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The Impact Of Structured Play On Early Literacy Skills In A Kindergarten Classroom

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THE IMPACT OF STRUCTURED PLAY ON EARLY LITERACY SKILLS IN A
KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM

by

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Dedication

First and foremost, I must thank God for blessing me with this opportunity to grow and learn as a professional. I would like to thank my husband, Nick, for the love and support he has given me throughout our marriage and especially through this degree program. To my son, Sawyer, I hope this has instilled in you a goal of pursuing a higher education. Always be a life-long learner and never give up on your dreams. Thank you to my mother, Liz, who has always been my biggest cheerleader with her unwavering support and encouragement throughout my life. I only hope that I can be the mother to Sawyer that you are to me. To my Uncle Matt, thank you for setting a wonderful example of what an educator should be. Your guidance has helped me grow as a person and a professional. Thank you to my cousin, Megan, for being my sounding board for the good, the bad, and the ugly. I wish you the best in your master's program. To my teaching assistant, Barbara, thank you for always listening and encouraging me even when I wanted to give up. To all of my family, friends, and colleagues, thank you for your love and support throughout this journey.

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Abstract

The present action research study of kindergarten students, in a suburban public school classroom located in the midlands region of South Carolina, describes the ways in which a teacher-researcher developed a Structured Play Unit in her classroom that was designed to answer the following research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* Implemented in the Fall of 2017, data was collected over a four-week period. A verbal pre-test was given to the teacher-researcher's kindergarten class which required students to identify pictures of rhyming words and point to their response, in order to determine the selected group to participate prior to the treatment. The student-participants, nine students known as the experimental group, received the treatment which was the implementation of structured play activities that consisted of playing rhyming games with pictures. A verbal post-test was administered to assess the effectiveness of the treatment on the early literacy skill of rhyming. Using an action research pre-experimental design known as a one-group pretest-posttest design, quantitative data was collected. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the measure of central tendency for data analysis. A repeated-measures *t* test compared scores taken from the mean of the pre-test and post-test assessments. A teacher journal was also kept throughout the four-week data collection period to record observations from the Structured Play Unit and to polyangulate the

quantitative data set. Findings include an increased ability among these nine children to identify pictured rhyming words. An action research plan includes ways in which kindergarten teachers can organize classrooms to enable students to engage in structured play that involves hands-on experiential learning vis-à-vis structured play.

Keywords: action research, early literacy skills, play, structured play, kindergarten

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Children at play and early literacy development are the keywords in many studies, past and present. Many are curious to know the impact if any, and in what capacity, that play has on early literacy development. A recent article from Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, and Almon (2015) investigated the impact of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) on Kindergarten children and stated, “For Kindergarten alone, there are more than 90 standards that young children are expected to meet” (p. 2). The authors further explained the emphasis on teachers to have their students reading books by the end of kindergarten. Moreover, their research of the CCSS could not lead to any research supporting that the CCSS were written with the consideration of developmental stages. “In fact, of the people on the committees that wrote and reviewed the CCSS, not one of those individuals was a K-3rd-grade teacher or an early childhood professional” (p. 3). To further their research, they investigated the long-term effects of a more play-based environment versus a strong standards-based classroom. They found, “children learn best when they are engaged in activities geared to their developmental levels, prior experiences and current needs” (p. 5). Unfortunately, kindergarten has become more like a first-grade classroom because of higher academic expectations. “Active, play-based experiences in language-rich environments help children develop their ideas about symbols, oral language, and their printed word – all vital components of reading” (p. 6).

As the researcher, my strong feelings toward developmentally appropriate early literacy instruction, coupled with a passionate desire to improve my teaching ability, can provide an avenue to reach my professional goal and will enable my students to learn more effectively. Professionally, researchers investigate better models of education for the students in our classrooms. A more detailed description of the literature review follows in chapter two.

Problem of Practice Statement

The identified problem of practice in the Creek School District (pseudonym) centers on the development of early childhood programs that revolve around the importance of early literacy development through play. Currently, in the researcher's classroom, early childhood curriculum is focused heavily on academics, such as English/Language Arts (ELA) and Math because of the district and state mandates that require young children to absorb and perform academic tasks, which, in most cases, are not considered developmentally appropriate. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children ([NAEYC], n.d.),

Kindergarten is a time of change, challenge, and opportunity. In many ways, kindergarteners are still like preschoolers. Yet with the increasing focus on school readiness, many kindergarten classrooms, unfortunately, bow to pressures and begin to look more like a primary classroom than a kindergarten. Kindergarten can shape a child's overall outlook on and engagement in lifelong learning. (para. 1)

Students, especially in the researcher's kindergarten classroom, need to be engaged in the classroom environment through socialization and instruction, having opportunities to play, and experience learning through discovery. Teachers can nurture students by designing instruction that is developmentally appropriate for children in the classroom with the goal being to enable children to be sensitive to cultural differences and to give daily opportunities for social interaction among peers with teacher guidance (NAEYC, n.d.).

Research Question and Objectives

This action research study will attempt to answer the following question:

RQ1: How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?

Mertler (2014) argued that “Teachers must be able and willing to critically examine their own practice as well as how students (both collectively and individually) learn best” (p. 12). Through the design and implementation of the Structured Play Unit, the researcher worked to improve her craft for the benefit of her students and herself as a professional, being reflective and flexible in the process. Most importantly, the researcher in this action research model sought to answer a question that was meaningful to her classroom and to find solutions to problems that could be solved. A more detailed description of the methodology follows in chapter three.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present action research study was to determine if the implementation of structured play was a factor contributing to early literacy development

for one class of kindergarten students at Eagle Elementary School (pseudonym). In response to the problem of practice noted in the previous section, the researcher sought to satisfy the rigorous district and state academic mandates for ELA curriculum through more developmentally appropriate methods of teaching and learning. Furthermore, through the guiding framework of the research question, the researcher sought to determine how the implementation of structured play impacted the early literacy skill of phonological awareness encompassing rhyming. The purpose of the action research gathered was to inform participants, parents/guardians, colleagues, and administrators of the effects of structured play on early literacy development in a kindergarten classroom. Understanding that action research is a cyclical process, this study further sought to implement a more developmentally appropriate pedagogy for improving future teaching practices for the students in the researcher's care.

Scholarly Literature

Early European foundational scholars who influenced today's Progressivist educational theorists include John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These men were early leaders in progressive education. Locke was known to believe that children learned best, not by being given concepts through the control of an adult, but by interests that appear from observations and involvement in learning. Rousseau, in accordance with Locke, believed that teachers forcing students to memorize facts was not effective education. John Dewey (1938) furthered their work in the United States with his version of Progressivism, referring to "traditional schools" in his book *Experience and Education* as a place where children were required to sit and listen to the information being

regurgitated by the teacher. There were no real interactions, activities, or experiences being used to help children better understand the material being taught. He sought to “attempt to give new direction to the work of the schools” (Dewey, 1938, p. 30).

The pedagogical importance of Dewey’s Progressivism theory includes student inquiry and interests being guided by the teacher, in addition to interdisciplinary curricular content. Students engage in hands-on experiences to learn by doing. The curriculum is flexible and highly personalized. It utilizes diverse resources, not just textbooks where students memorize and regurgitate factoids in isolation from their peers. Progressivists use motivation to encourage lifelong learning through discovery, encompassing the development of social skills through collaborative group work. When developing curriculum, Progressivists look ahead to the skills that will be needed in the future of society. Remembering that, “According to Dewey, ideas, values, and institutions should change as the needs of society change” (Spring, 2014, p. 252).

Key Words/Glossary

Action research. According to Mills (2011),

Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administration, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn.

(p. 4)

Early literacy. Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003), stated their definition of early literacy,

Today a variety of terms are used to refer to the preschool phase of literacy development—emerging literacy, emergent reading, emergent writing, early reading, symbolic tools, and so on. We have adopted the term *early literacy* as the most comprehensive yet concise description of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that precede learning to read and write in the primary grades (K–3). We chose this term because, in the earliest phases of literacy development, forming reading and writing concepts and skills is a dynamic process. (p. 2)

Play. According Saracho and Spodek (2006),

Play contributes to almost every human achievement and develops a foundation for human culture. Through play, young children engage in a diverse set of play experiences such as imitative experiences, communication of ideas, concrete objects and several socialization levels. When children play, they acquire information about their intellectual and social world. (p. 715)

Structured play. Structured play, also referred to as play with a purpose, is a led, hands-on, activity with a precise learning objective as the focus. This type of play has many forms. It can be a physical or mental challenge that teaches a new skill. “The goal of structured play is to have fun while teaching.” The purpose is to keep “child[ren] active while learning!” (Rock, 2017, para. 1)

Kindergarten. Kindergarten is a time of change, challenge, and opportunity. In many ways, kindergarteners are still like preschoolers. Yet with the increasing focus on school readiness, many kindergarten classrooms, unfortunately, bow to pressures and begin to look more like a primary classroom than a kindergarten (NAEYC, n.d., para. 1).

Potential Weaknesses

Prior to the implementation of the structured play unit, the researcher assumed that student collaboration would be more of a natural, and less of a forced, process. She anticipated that students would embrace the unit and did not account for personality conflicts in collaborative settings and distinct differences in student personalities. Both were factors in student engagement and had to be navigated for the researcher to effectively facilitate structured play.

This action research study was limited by the sample size, as it was restricted to one kindergarten classroom and then further reduced to a small group of nine student-participants. This group was formed through a one-group pretest-posttest design which did not allow for a comparison group of those students who did not receive the treatment of the Structured Play Unit. Additionally, the researcher conducted the study over a four-week period, which also limited the time frame for data collection.

The Significance of the Study

The researcher focused on finding additional information about the effect of structured play on early literacy skills, specifically, rhyming words. This study followed the cyclical nature of action research incorporating the four stages: planning, acting, developing, and reflecting. The planning stage included identifying a problem within the researcher's classroom, conducting research about the identified problem for a literature review, and then developing a research plan. In the acting stage, the researcher collected and analyzed data using quantitative methods, based on a one-group pretest-posttest design. Once the researcher had gathered the data, she evaluated the need for a

developmentally-appropriate pedagogy within the classroom. The final stage ended with a professional reflection on the action research study, emphasizing its efficiency towards gathering more information about the identified problem and generating possible solutions. The researcher discovered modifications and other questions that could be addressed with further research. The researcher also shared the results of the study with the participants, parents/guardians, colleagues, and administrators. Nancy Dana and Diane Yendol-Hoppey (2014) stated, “Sharing your inquiry with other professionals can change the very ways your students experience schooling” (p. 236). Through this action research study, the researcher intended to learn more about the teaching pedagogy and curriculum to become a more effective advocate for the students in her classroom, for her colleagues, and for developmentally appropriate educational practices. The researcher also used this action research study to find a way to satisfy rigorous district and state ELA standards through more developmentally appropriate teaching practices. More information follows in chapter three.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of the action research was to determine if the implementation of structured play was a factor contributing to early literacy development (rhyming words) in the researcher’s kindergarten classroom, and then to implement a more developmentally appropriate pedagogy to improve future teaching practices for students in the researcher’s care. Through this action research plan, the researcher sought to answer the following research question: How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?

The video, *A Nation at Risk: 30 Years Later* by The Education Gadfly (2013), illustrated that public schools were beginning to decline in the early 1980's. The public schools needed to address the issues of low standards, lack of resources, accountability, quality teaching, and administration. The report, *A Nation at Risk*, was a wake-up call for America that interjected the need for higher standards and better schools. This report indicated public schools could change society for the better. For example:

The 1980's saw the beginnings of a shift in Kindergarten education from play-based experimental approaches to more academic approaches, from hands-on exploration to worksheets and led instruction. They were given a mighty push by No Child Left Behind and another by Race to the Top's early childhood competitive grants, causing many to describe Kindergarten as the new first grade. (Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015, p. 2)

As a result of this profound shift in kindergarten education, the researcher designed this action research study in direct response to the increasingly rigorous academic demands in the researcher's school district and state, with the emphasis on play rapidly decreasing in kindergarten classrooms across the district.

In chapter two, the literature review encompasses Dewey's Progressivist Theory, which served as the framework for the researcher's action research study. In chapter three, the roles of the researcher and student-participants are described in relation to the quantitative action research study, in addition to the kindergarten classroom setting, and the data collection process. In chapter four, the findings of the data collection are explained and interpreted as they relate to the research question. In chapter five, the

action plan is derived from the key questions that emerged from the findings and suggestions for future research are described that could facilitate pedagogical change in the researcher's classroom.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review exhibits the researcher's knowledge of early literacy skills, play, and kindergarten; however, it goes beyond merely reporting and serves as a critical review of each source. "A literature review allows you to use the insights and discoveries of others whose research came before yours in order to make your research more efficient and effective" (Mertler, 2014, p. 61). The studies the researcher found directly related to the increasingly rigorous academic demands in the researcher's school district and supported play pedagogy as a more developmentally appropriate teaching practice. In addition, the literature review identifies connections between the works found and the researcher's action research study.

Its purpose is to convey to all individuals interested in the particular topic of the action research project the following: the historical context of the topic, the trends experienced by the topic, [and] how theory has informed practice and vice versa.

(Mertler, 2014, p. 73)

A literature review helps to validate the researcher's rationale for her research, convincing the readers of the impact of structured play on the development of early literacy skills (rhyming). It further provides the researcher with knowledge from the past, current studies related to the topic of interest, and proposals for future research.

Chapter two is grounded in theory and practice supporting relevant and current research. Different points of view were examined in this literature review to consider a variety of perspectives and methodologies. A summary of the literature was used to substantiate educational trends that were relevant to this action research study. Both primary and secondary sources provided a foundational understanding of the themes of classroom environment and the connection between play and literacy. (See figure 1.1)

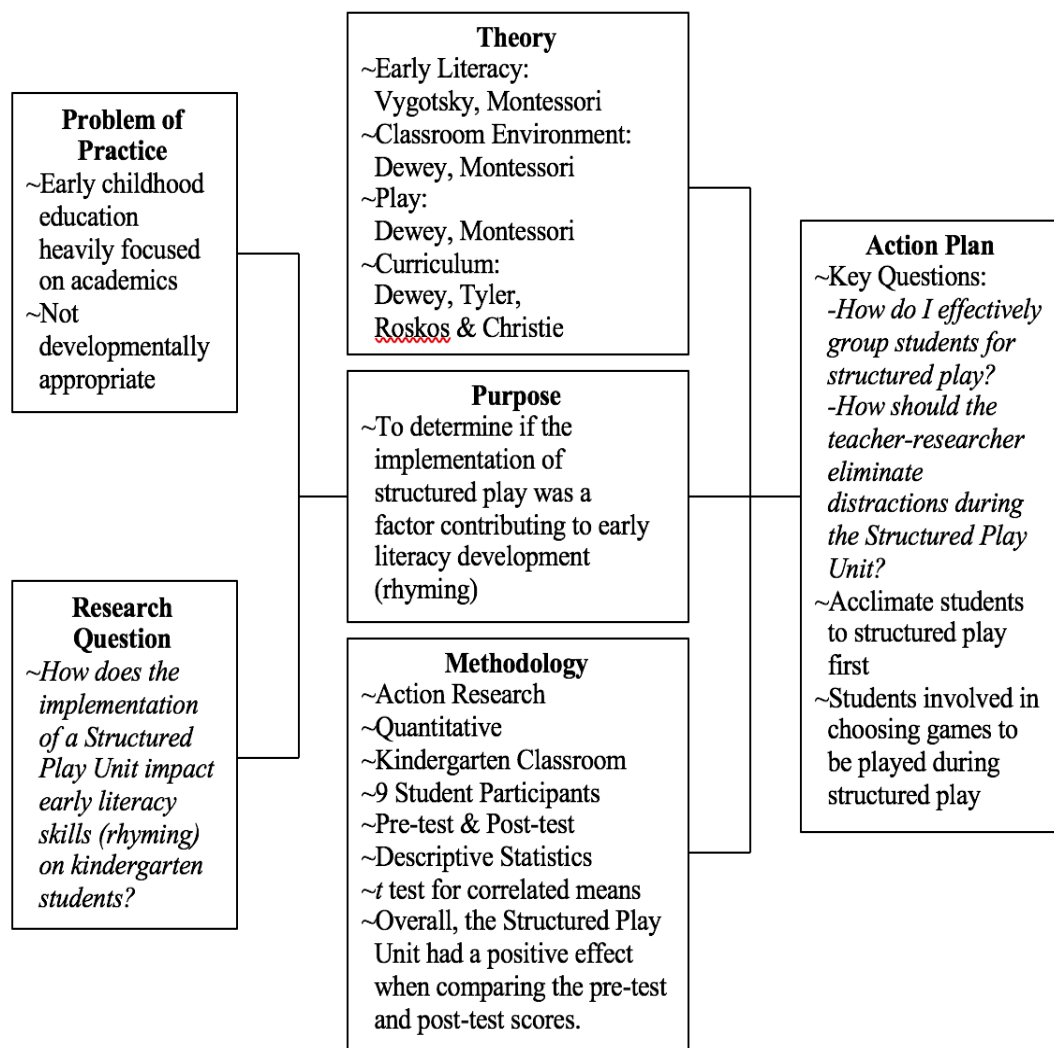


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this action research study identifies the problem of practice, research question, purpose, theory, methodology, and action plan. The problem of practice surrounding this action research study centers around an early childhood curriculum heavily focused on academics, such as English/Language Arts (ELA) and Math due to district and state expectations and mandates that require our youngest kindergarten learners to perform academic tasks in which many are not developmentally appropriate. Due to the academic demands in the researcher's kindergarten classroom, she has designed a Structured Play Unit to answer the following research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?*

The purpose of this action research study was to determine if the implementation of structured play was a factor contributing to early literacy development for one class of twenty kindergarten students at Eagle Elementary School (EES). The researcher sought to satisfy the rigorous district and state ELA mandates through a more developmentally appropriate method of teaching and learning. Throughout this chapter, the reader can find more information about the theory and theorist that helped to frame this action research study. The researcher began with the broad topic of early literacy and how it contributes to the reading and writing connection, then followed with information on the classroom environment, play, and early literacy connections. Different points of view about standardizing knowledge, learning in the 21st century, and moving forward were also included to help the reader develop a strong understanding of curriculum and how it looks modeling John Dewey's Progressivist Theory. The methodology for this

quantitative action research study includes the researcher's kindergarten class of twenty students. These students were all given a pre-test to determine who would participate in the Structured Play Unit. Nine student-participants scored *no/little* or *some* according to the rubric and participated in the four-week Structured Play Unit (Appendix D). At the end of the unit, the nine student-participants were given a post-test to determine if the Structured Play Unit had any impact on the early literacy skill of rhyming. Descriptive statistics and a *t*-test for correlated means were used to determine that the Structured Play Unit had a positive effect when comparing the pre-test and post-test scores.

Since action research is cyclical, an action plan was developed, in chapter five, by the researcher to address key questions and include suggestions for further research. Three key questions became evident throughout the four-week Structured Play Unit: *How do I effectively group students for structured play?*, *How should the researcher eliminate distractions during the Structured Play Unit?*, and *What do teachers need to adopt progressivist pedagogy within an essentialist public school?* The researcher suggested in her action plan that students should be acclimated to structured play first and involved in choosing the games to be played during the Structured Play Unit.

Themes and Ideas

Early literacy. Roskos, Christie, and Richgels (2003) stated their definition of early literacy,

Today a variety of terms are used to refer to the preschool phase of literacy development—emerging literacy, emergent reading, emergent writing, early reading, symbolic tools, and so on. We have adopted the term *early literacy* as the

most comprehensive yet concise description of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that precede learning to read and write in the primary grades (K–3). We chose this term because, in the earliest phases of literacy development, forming reading and writing concepts and skills is a dynamic process. (p. 2)

Oral communication plays a large role in early literacy development, encompassing learning to read and write. Calkins (1994) wrote,

The young child’s writing is an outgrowth of the infant’s gestures. As L.S.

Vygotsky points out, Gestures are writing in air, and written signs frequently are simply gestures that have been fixed. (p. 59)

Vygotsky argued that babies begin to realize the influence of these gestures through adult response. Moreover, when babies are learning to speak using simple one-word statements, they too are learning the power of language because of the response from an adult. Ray and Glover (2008) stated, “Children learn the power of language because they are surrounded by people who use language for real-world reasons and expect children to do so as well” (p. 60). When babies are learning to speak, they are not corrected when their oral language is not correct. Instead, parents celebrate this milestone. When children are learning to read and write, this should be no different. Parents and teachers should celebrate this achievement as well.

Montessori stated,

My idea was that in order to establish natural, rational methods, it was essential that we make numerous, exact, and rational observations of man as an individual,

principally during infancy, which is the age at which the foundations of education and culture must be laid. (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 20)

A parent and school teacher's responsibilities are the same. Montessori believed observation was of utmost importance when learning a child's needs. Montessori (1967) stated,

There is only one basis for observation: the children must be free to express themselves and thus reveal those needs and attitudes which would otherwise remain hidden or repressed in an environment that did not permit them to act spontaneously. (p. 46)

In order to observe, children must be given the opportunity to explore and become independent. Montessori (1967) argued, "No one can be free if he is not independent, therefore, in order to attain the independence, the active manifestations of personal liberty must be guided from earliest infancy" (p. 56). Through this, children increase their self-confidence and belief in one's self which is carried throughout their life. Montessori considered freedom to choose, within limits, and explorations to be essential in education. Montessori (1967) stated, "A basic requirement for a scientific, educational program must, therefore, be a school that will permit a child to freely develop his own personal life" (p. 19). For this to take place, Montessori ensured the environment was child-sized, structured, and organized. She wanted others to understand children absorbed everything in the environment by experiencing it. Montessori (1967) argued,

Many permanent defects, like those of speech, are acquired when one is a child because we neglect to take care of individuals at the most important period of

their lives when their principal functions are formed and stabilized, that is, when they are between the ages of three and six. (p. 34)

Educating preschool-aged children is necessary, encompassing the freedom to explore their environment and learning through interaction with their peers. Montessori further believed language was a child's most significant educational accomplishment, laying the foundation for writing and reading instruction.

Reading and writing connection. According to Gerde, Bingham, and Wasik (2012),

Although research on writing is limited, the findings indicate that young children's writing, including name writing, is related to later reading and literacy skills. In particular, children's emergent writing in Kindergarten predicts later literacy skills including decoding, spelling, and reading comprehension in first grade, and spelling in second grade. (p. 351-59)

Although writing develops in different stages, children should be given opportunities to write at an early age. Bomer explained,

Writing may actually be a better way to lead children's literacy development than reading. As Randy Bomer explained, a blank page presents children with an invitation (to make meaning), while reading presents them with an expectation (to figure out someone else's meaning). (Ray & Glover, 2008, p. 13)

Knowledge of the letters and letter sounds are useful information when writing; however, children can learn to write long before they fully understand the importance of actually putting letters and words on the paper. "Even as children gain more experience and begin

using the letter-sound system to help them write, their writing development will continue to outpace their reading development for a while” (Ray & Glover, 2008, p.13). Exposure to different types of texts through independently reading and read alouds can essentially inform a child of written language and how it can be used. Cambourne (1995) said, “Learners need to be immersed in text of all kinds” (p. 48). Books can be used to recognize how written language sounds and to explore personal connections to texts. Students must experience educational opportunities in a strong literacy environment that, in turn, teaches them about themselves and the world around them.

Classroom environment. In exploring Dewey’s (1938) book, *Experience & Education*, he refers to traditional schools as a place where children were made to sit and listen to the information being regurgitated by the teacher. There are no real interactions, activities, or experiences being used to help children better understand the material being taught. He wanted to “attempt to give new direction to the work of the schools” (p. 30). Dewey believed education and life experiences were intertwined and children learn best by doing. The starting point for education should always be based on the child’s curiosities and feelings. In the classroom, students should have different opportunities to read and write during play, embedded in each center. By giving students these opportunities, they learn to see that reading and writing have a purpose in their life.

Dewey (1938) stated,

The greater maturity of experience which should belong to the adult as educator puts him in a position to evaluate each experience of the young in a way in which

the one having the less mature experience cannot do. It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading. (p. 38)

A child-centered classroom is of utmost importance; however, children are not spontaneously exploring their surroundings without direction, but teachers instead control and nurture these interests for an explicit purpose with an end goal in mind.

Play. Saracho and Spodek (2006) stated,

Play contributes to almost every human achievement and develops a foundation for human culture. Through play, young children engage in a diverse set of play experiences such as imitative experiences, communication of ideas, concrete objects and several socialization levels. When children play, they acquire information about their intellectual and social world. (p. 715)

Children move through different stages as they learn to play. As infants, children will play alone with limited interaction. Through the age of two, children will begin parallel play. The child may sit near another child and may even use similar toys, but the concentration remains on playing alone. As children age, they begin to interact with other children by sharing and playing closely with others. This is important to the development of their communication skills. Cooperative play begins when children become school-aged, up to the beginning of first grade. They form groups and use their imagination to role play, making suggestions for what they will do together (GEMS World Academy Chicago, 2017).

Progressivists John Dewey and Maria Montessori had similar but conflicting views of play. Dewey (1916) portrayed a child's play should be separate from work.

Children will develop into a working adult that will no longer play but obtain pleasure from their career. Montessori (1967) portrayed that a child's play was work to them. Play was sensory to Montessori, with children manipulating tools as the teacher guided children to learn through play. Both Dewey and Montessori shared similar views of learning in that it is absorbed through the environment with purposeful interactions.

Play and early literacy connection. "Children's literacy behaviors emerge in a play setting when they obtain knowledge on the purposes and features of print in early literacy development" (Saracho & Spodek, 2006, p. 719). Teachers must give students the space and time in the classroom with the resources they need to enrich their literary experience through play. Children's knowledge of the play setting needs to be supported, with the teacher present to guide the children through demonstration and collaboration (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Roskos (2000) agreed by stating,

At play, children use words to tell, to name, to report, to explain, to argue, to reason, and to create. Critical for young children at school is plenty of opportunity for talk in these ways with their peers and their teachers – a primary reason that play belongs in the curriculum and should be well represented there. (p. 12)

Literacy should also be viewed as a social skill where children interact and learn through their experiences. Simply stated, literacy enhances play and play offers a chance for children to be literate. (Christie, 1991)

Points of View

Standardizing knowledge. Beginning in the 1900's, the Factory Model of Education was prevalent in our schools. Peel and McCary (1997) stated, "The old factory

metaphor envisioned teachers as workers and students as products and described teaching as the transmission of pre-organized knowledge (i.e., facts) to learners” (p. 5). In this setting, the teacher did most of the talking and the students received knowledge through a passive approach. Schools were portrayed as factories where students entered the building, were molded into a product, and then exited. There was no real thinking and understanding in what they were learning. Strategies were taught in a skill and drill format. A Factory Model classroom could be visualized as centered with emphasis on worksheets and tests. Students would sit at desks positioned in rows and would be expected to listen in isolation, memorize facts, and focus on the end product. Teachers would use pre-packaged programs for instruction with no collaboration among the class, and strategies would be taught beginning with the part and moving towards the whole (Oglan, 1999).

Flinders and Thornton (2013) revealed, through the work of Sleeter and Stillman, the role of the federal government in education began to expand due in large part to the civil rights movement beginning in the 1960’s. People of color, in the community, insisted the curriculum and instruction in the schools reflect their community and culture in the same way as provided for the white children. These members examined materials being used in the schools and found they may be “culturally irrelevant to students of color, and inaccessible to students of non-English language backgrounds” (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 255).

A nation at risk. Leading up to the 1980’s, curriculum began to encompass multicultural and bilingual learning styles. For the most part, teachers were using “their

own sense-making process” to integrate this throughout the curriculum (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 254). The Education Gadfly (2013), mentioned that our public schools were beginning to decline in the early 1980’s. Areas needing to be addressed were low standards, lack of resources, accountability, quality teaching, and administration. In Gardner’s (1982) report, he interjected the need for higher standards and better schools in America. This report indicated public schools could change society for the better.

Into the 21st century. “No Child Left Behind, passed by Congress and signed into law in 2001, mandates that states receiving federal funding implement accountability systems, with annual testing in reading and math” (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 256). According to Spring (2014), “Race to the Top created an incentive for the development of a nationalized curriculum with the adoption of Common Core State Standards by the National Governors Association in 2010” (p. 447). In February of 2009, President Barack Obama and his administration introduced several different types of educational reform, including *Race to the Top* (United States Department of Education, 2009), to help America, compete globally. His administration felt American students would need a broader skill base to contend with others in India and China. In 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) was passed as a law, which modified the *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) and shifted more accountability to the states.

Common Core State Standards. Policies were added to the legislation, specifically Common Core State Standards (CCSS), “that prepare[d] students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy” (Spring, 2014, p. 445). These standards are intended to prepare students for the workforce which, in turn,

leads to a higher goal of America contending “in the global economic system” (Spring, 2014, p. 447). As of July 2012, forty-six out of fifty states had accepted these standards. There has been much debate around CCSS in recent years. Spring (2014) stated, “Despite the claim that the CCSS are evidenced-based, there is no existing research supporting the claim that the Standards will lead to students being more competitive in the global workforce” (p. 448). He further suggested that “the Standards might be primarily based on political and cultural decisions” (Spring, 2014, p. 449). *Race to the Top* coupled with the CCSS has placed student test scores at the forefront of the current educational system in America. Spring (2014) alluded that this legislation has contributed to student attitudes towards school, curriculum being taught by teachers, administration, and institutes of higher education. Schools taught CCSS in the state of South Carolina for the 2014-2015 school year.

During the Summer of 2014, Act 200 declared the South Carolina Department of Education needed to create new state standards, including Inquiry-Based Literacy Standards, to be implemented the following school year. According to the South Carolina College- and Career- Ready Standards for English Language Arts document created by the South Carolina Department of Education (2015),

The South Carolina College- and Career- Ready Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) 2015 are the result of a process designed to identify, evaluate, synthesize, and create the most high-quality, rigorous standards for South Carolina’s students. The standards are designed to ensure that South Carolina

students are prepared to enter and succeed in economically viable career opportunities or postsecondary education and ensuring careers. (p. 6)

Teachers in the state of South Carolina are held accountable for teaching these standards in their classroom. Students are assessed in numerous ways, and some scores are reported to the state for district, administration, and teacher evaluation. Due to this top-down approach for educating students, teachers are being forced to focus on tested skills, even beyond their better judgment, and reverting to the 1900's Factory Model of Education to make sure they cover all skills for the test. Editors, Flinders and Thornton (2013) promoted the work of Sleeter and Stillman in their analysis of California's curriculum standards stating,

Like a century ago, curriculum is being organized scientifically for efficiency, deriving learning objectives from social and economic needs and casting teachers as managers of the process of producing student achievement scores. But both sets of standards, and particularly those in reading/language arts, deflect attention from their ideological underpinnings by virtue of being situated within a testing movement. Rather than asking whose knowledge, language, and points of view are most worth teaching children, teachers and administrators are pressed to ask how well children are scoring on standardized measures of achievement. (p. 266)

Today's students, now more than ever, need teachers to advocate and reevaluate curriculum methods and find new ways to connect teaching and learning. Teachers must now focus on the Community Model of Education to meet students' individual needs. Leland and Kasten (2002) stated, "students should learn how to 'share their

understandings and build on each other's insights' rather than being trained for a type of high-volume standardized production" (p. 10). Students must become invested in their learning by finding what they are interested in and moving forward. Students would then be able to activate their prior knowledge to gain meaning from what they are learning.

Moving forward in the 21st century. Vygotsky (1978) and Butler and Turbill (1984) believed that teachers must match learning to the child by giving them opportunities to participate. The environment would be collaborative among the teacher and students viewing learning as a social process. Leland and Kasten (2002) believed, "Because the teacher has not predetermined the entire curriculum, students are invited to participate in making decisions about how they and others in the class will spend their time" (p. 11). The students would have a voice in the classroom by becoming active participants in their knowledge gained.

In agreement with Dewey, Johnson (2006) stated, "If we want fundamental changes in the quality of education, then we must focus on the quality of education" (p. 4). Schools, teachers, and students should exemplify a Community Model of Education through cooperative learning, embracing diversity in all aspects, and meeting students' individual needs by offering choice and investing in their interests as learners in every classroom (Johnson, 2006).

To support a Community Model of Education in a kindergarten classroom, the researcher developed the action research plan to determine the effects of structured play on early literacy (rhyming). This action research plan provided opportunities for cooperative learning as well as accommodating the individual needs of students. In an

attempt to determine what action research, if any, has been conducted on this topic of interest, the researcher performed an expanded search. However, the findings were action research studies on the correlation between play and learning but none specifically related to structured play and early literacy or rhyming.

Summaries of Literature

Curriculum. According to Progressivist, Ralph W. Tyler, in his work *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, “The rationale developed here begins with identifying four fundamental questions which must be answered in developing any curriculum and plan of instruction.” Questions one and two encompass the aspect of educational purposes and experiences to accomplish the purposes. The third question incorporates how the educational experiences should be organized. Lastly, the fourth question seeks to “determine whether these purposes are being attained” (p. 20). Tyler further explained that educational programs without distinct purposes lead the way to an educator’s interpretation of what they believe to be good teaching. Objectives should be obtained through an analysis of the school’s philosophy of education to ensure “the school goals will have a greater significance and greater validity” (Flinders & Thorton, 2013, p. 59-60). Tyler’s basic principles of curriculum and instruction led the researcher to believe there are areas of concern for early childhood education not being adequately addressed. Miller and Almon (2009), associated with the Alliance for Childhood, stated in their report,

Kindergarten has changed radically in the last two decades in ways that few Americans are aware of. Children now spend far more time being taught and

tested on literacy and math skills than they do learning through play and exploration, exercising their bodies, and using their imaginations. Many kindergartens use highly prescriptive curricula geared to new state standards and linked to standardized tests. In an increasing number of kindergartens, teachers must follow scripts from which they may not deviate. These practices, which are not well grounded in research, violate long-established principles of child development and good teaching. It is increasingly clear that they are compromising both children's health and their long-term prospects for success in school. (p. 11)

Young children need opportunities to play and experience learning through discovery. Play lends itself to learning through socialization and early literacy development. Much research has been incorporated in the study *The Play-Literacy Nexus, and the Importance of Evidence-Based Techniques in the Classroom* by Roskos and Christie (2011) stated,

One of the more robust findings in play, literacy research suggests that a literacy-enriched play environment promotes literacy behaviors. Stocking the environment with literacy materials and tools stimulates literacy interactions in the course of play. Adult involvement and intervention infuse literacy concepts and skills into play activity, and children share literacy knowledge and processes with one another in their play episodes. Many of these studies show the large impact that enriched play settings have on literacy versus non-enriched play settings, reporting the benefits of literacy-enriched play for children's literacy exposure, knowledge (e.g., print awareness), and range of experience (e.g., functional print),

especially in the preschool years. This research demonstrates an argument ecological psychologists have long made: the environment informs and shapes behavior. (p. 211)

Curriculum and instruction should challenge students to think while stimulating their curiosity and imagination. It should encourage students to explore new ideas and express their thoughts through creative writing and thinking, therefore providing students the opportunity to complete meaningful reading and writing tasks exposing them to a wide variety of literary experiences. For students to grow and develop, they must experience educational opportunities in a strong literary environment that teach them about themselves and the world around them especially through play.

Teaching for social justice. Mills, Stephens, O’Keefe, and Waugh (2004) discussed that “Although we can’t re-create history as teachers, we can reflect on and learn from our past to make a better future” (p. 54). Administrators, faculty, and staff school-wide must first rid the environment and teaching practices of stereotypes and cultural bias. Discussions must include an open conversation with the students, teachers, and all educational stakeholders. A non-threatening environment coupled with a respectful classroom community would encourage students to have a voice and discuss with others their opinions on different topics. “This stance forces us to acknowledge and confront the questions and challenges that emerge when we make space in the curriculum for children’s voices” (Mills, Stephens, O’Keefe, & Waugh, 2004, p. 49). Giving students an opportunity to speak out about their concerns and opinions could bring up conflict, but students need to learn that this is okay when discussion, not ignorance or violence,

surround it. Knowledge can be used to empower students, but they must seek out that knowledge to have a broader global perspective.

Dewey (1938) stated the responsibility of the schools was to build awareness of social justice, which is important when expecting young children to grow up to be productive citizens in society. Young children are naturally curious about their world. “[A]s you listen to the children you know, pursue their burning questions, tell and retell their stories” (Cowhey, 2006, p. 21). Educators must help students become investigators of their knowledge. They must nurture critical thinking, help students make connections to new material, and have students ask the questions. To teach critically, the teacher must always be a learner. Using songs, picture books, poetry, simulations, and guest speakers make a curriculum come alive. Teachers can bring the curriculum to life by inviting guests into the classroom to share their story, and this can help connections emerge for students throughout the school year. “It doesn’t have to be sophisticated or brilliant. It just has to be relevant and real” (Cowhey, 2006, p. 80).

The need for school reform. Eisner (2001) stated,

The aim was then, and is today, to systematize and standardize so that the public will know which schools are performing well and which are not. There were to be then, and there are today, payments and penalties for performance. (p. 279)

Eisner further indicated, in America, schools operate under the U.S. Department of Education; however, the Constitution does not directly denote education to be the responsibility of the federal government. Therefore, items “not assign[ed] explicitly to the federal government belong to the states (or to the people)” (Eisner, 2001, p. 279). He

used the word *rationalization* to help others understand the course required to improve America's public schools. Eisner believed predetermined outcomes should be well-defined using standards and rubrics. He further explained,

We are supposed to know what the outcomes of educational practice are to be, and rubrics are to exemplify those outcomes. Standards are more general statements intended to proclaim our values. One argument for the use of standards and rubrics is that they are necessary if we are to function rationally. (Eisner, 2001, p. 279-280).

Schools use assessments to measure the progress and achievement of students based on their knowledge of the standards. Due to these types of assessment measures, schools and students can be compared, especially in the sense of the School Report Card in which each school, in the state of South Carolina, receives a rating based on their performance. In turn, the public and community could potentially make judgments based on the effectiveness of the district, school, and teachers compared to other surrounding areas and states. "If youngsters are in schools that have different curricula or that allocate differing amounts of time to different areas of the curriculum, comparing the outcomes of those schools without taking into account their differences are extremely questionable" (Eisner, 2001, p. 280). Unfortunately, rationalization can also be the cause of fewer interactions among teachers and peers. Conversations are a powerful teaching tool that can provide opportunities in the classroom for thinking and responding in a way that can be directly applied to real life situations outside of the school setting. Unfortunately, there seems to be no place for conversations and imagination in the school setting. Due to the pressure

of teaching mandated standards and high-stakes testing, school experiences are not what they should be. “Tests come to define our priorities” (Eisner, 2001, p. 281). The field of education is losing sight of developmentally appropriate practices for the youngest children in the public school setting. Play is becoming less of what others see as a necessity in the classroom due to rigorous mandated standards and high-stakes testing. Eisner said it best, “It’s what students do with what they learn when they can do what they want to do that is the real measure of educational achievement” (Eisner, 2001, p. 283). Roskos and Christie (2011), stated their research findings,

One of the most robust findings in play-literacy research suggests that a literacy-enriched play environment promotes literacy behaviors. Stocking the environment with literacy materials and tools stimulates literacy interactions in the course of play. Adult involvement and intervention infuse literacy concepts and skills into play activity. And children share literacy knowledge and processes with one another in their play episodes. (p. 211)

They further explained that many additional studies inform about the benefits of including literacy-enriched play versus a classroom environment that does not have literacy-enriched play time for students aged three to five years old. Throughout their study, they offered many questions that researchers should still investigate as to the direct impact of play and literacy. This is an important time in education as demands are growing larger each year and expanding to the youngest of children in the public school system.

Variables or Themes

Based on the literature review, two overarching themes emerged as focal points to frame the action research study. As a reflection of Dewey's beliefs described in the previous sections of this chapter, the classroom environment should be guided by the teacher and provide hands-on learning experiences. Instruction should be highly interactive, developing social skills through collaborative group work. This type of classroom environment is conducive to play-based learning. When appropriately structured, play promotes socialization, learning through discovery, and highly personalized educational experiences. Also, through this literature review, there is evidence of the need for school reform based upon the curriculum mandates set forth by local districts, states, and the federal government. Our youngest children are being required to participate in standardized testing and rigorous academic standards that are not developmentally appropriate. Educators must embrace these demanding mandates and find ways to alter their pedagogy to serve students best as well as teach the state standards.

Primary and Secondary Sources

To conduct the literature review, the researcher used scholarly academic journals and publications as primary sources of information and research. Locke, Rousseau, and Dewey are all well-known Progressivists whose theories are used to ground the teaching practices described in this action research study. The researcher reviewed many studies on play and literacy to show the relevancy of this action research study to inform and reflect upon her current teaching practices in a kindergarten classroom. Secondary

sources such as newspaper articles were also used to supplement the literature of the primary sources and explore how these Progressivist theories are put into practice today.

Methodologies

The research described in the literature review was compiled from many different data collection methods, including, but not limited to, quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and meta-analysis. Examining a broad scope of research methods was critical for the researcher to build the foundation for her action research study. The methodologies included in the literature review provided opportunities for the researcher to view the research through different theoretical lenses and examine a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

Socialization and play are important to the development of young children. It is essential to understand the theory and practice behind what is developmentally appropriate for kindergarteners when considering play and early literacy skills. The researcher looked to those before her, as well as in the present, to fully understand the importance of connecting theory and practice. The researcher researched and analyzed the literature to learn what practices are best for teaching all children. It is necessary to examine how children develop and learn to give them opportunities to use the best resources for their academic growth.

The purpose of the present action research study is to explore and assess the impact of structured play on early literacy skills (rhyming). Due to the current academic demands on the kindergarten students in the researcher's classroom, there is less

emphasis on learning through play. Through a Structured Play Unit, this action research study sought to study the relationship between structured play and the early literacy skill of rhyming through the use of pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) and collaboration.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

According to Mills (2011),

Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administration, counselors, or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how their students learn.

(p. 4)

The researcher used action research when investigating the following research question:

How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills

(rhyming) on kindergarten students? By human nature, even at an early age, humans are curious and inquisitive, always wondering about the world around them. As an educator, the researcher must find ways to improve her teaching to facilitate maximum success for her students. A major component of this duty involves finding ways to encourage this curious and inquisitive nature while striving for their consistent academic growth.

“Research is simply one of many means by which human beings seek answers to questions” (Mertler, 2014, p. 5). Action research is a type of methodology used by the researcher in her own classroom using a question the researcher feels the need to further research for more information. This type of cyclical research is unique because the researcher is directly involved in the study. The researcher has identified a problem and

developed a plan of action. Because this plan of action involved the administration of a pre-test and a post-test in measuring student progress, the use of quantitative data was conducive to the comparison of test scores. By collecting and analyzing quantitative data and reflecting upon the results, the researcher can bring about a possible solution and collect more data/information around the specific topic of concern in the future. The researcher understands validity to be secondary in action research. Mertler (2014) reiterates,

Many of these sources of validity evidence are more appropriate for large-scale testing programs, especially where it is important for the results to be generalizable to much larger populations than simply those individuals included in a research study. Since this is not a purpose or goal of classroom-based action research, I am suggesting that researchers be most concerned with evidence of validity *based on instrument content*. (p. 149)

When using quantitative data, the pre-test and post-test should only assess the content being studied to incorporate the assessment being valid *based on instrument content* (Mertler, 2014). Ethical considerations were taken into account incorporating a description of the participants and overview of the research plan. Action research can be cyclical; however, it is still important for the researcher to share and communicate the results of her study with the participants, as well as others indicated in the study. Mertler (2014) concludes the end of his book by sharing, “YOU are taking the lead on finding ways to do YOUR work better and more effectively. Take time, find ways, and collaborate to celebrate these professional successes” (p. 258).

Action Research Paradigm

The researcher identified a problem of practice to be a strictly academic focus for learning to read and write in the kindergarten classroom. The purpose of the present action research study was to gain more information about play and how it may potentially affect early literacy skills. Mertler (2014) suggested for researchers to “develop a *research schedule*” and informs us of four key stages in developing an action research plan: planning, acting, developing, reflecting (p. 20).

Within the planning stage, the researcher identified the general topic of interest. When conducting action research, it was important to consider the following: the need to improve upon something that is not working very well in the classroom; the need of the researcher to make something better; and the need to improve the current practice. After considering these factors, the researcher then gathered more information about the topic of interest. Next, a review of the literature was conducted to investigate “existing source[s] of information that can shed light on the topic selected” (Mertler, 2014, p. 39). These resources can include but are not limited to, professional journals and books, websites, and colleagues, all of which are found in chapter two. The final step in the planning stage is to develop a research plan. The researcher stated a specific question to be studied, decided on the participants and reflected on the possibilities of data collection and ethical considerations. (Mertler, 2014, p. 39-41)

A review of the literature was conducted and led to many studies on aspects that related to the topic of interest. The action research study attempted to answer the following question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early*

literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students? The researcher informed and sought permission from parents/guardians of twenty kindergarten aged children for the participation in the implementation of structured play and the use of a pre-test and post-test for quantitative data collection and analysis. The researcher sent a letter of consent to parents or guardians (Appendix A). The researcher used a one-group pretest-posttest design, which is a type of pre-experimental design.

Within the acting stage, the researcher served as the instructor, determined the data to be collected, and determined how to collect it. For data collection, the researcher used quantitative methods. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data for this particular research, which was more beneficial than qualitative methods in answering the research question posed due to the ability to be able to compare test scores. More specifically, a pre-experimental design known as a one-group pretest-posttest design was used to collect and analyze data. Only one group of twenty kindergarten students were known as the experimental group. A pre-test was given prior to the treatment of this selected group. The treatment was implemented, and afterward, the selected group was given a post-test to assess the effectiveness of the treatment on the selected group. There was no control group in this type of design.

Researcher

As the researcher, my role was to serve as both an *insider* and an *outsider* throughout this action research study. The researcher chose the research question based on the needs of her classroom. The pre-test and post-test were also chosen to provide evidence of if the Structured Play Unit impacted the early literacy skill (rhyming). The

researcher collected the data in conjunction with the student-participants, and the data was analyzed and reflected upon with the nine student-participants, colleagues, and administration. The *insider* role of the researcher consisted of participating with the student-participants by partaking in discussions and playing pictured rhyming games during the data collection through the Structured Play Unit. The *outsider* role of the researcher consisted of observations of the student-participants' comments, reactions, and feelings throughout the Structured Play Unit. This *outsider* role was also evident during the data analysis by collecting and reviewing the pre-test and post-test scores as well as the analysis of the researcher's observations. Both the *insider* and *outsider* roles were evident during the reciprocal reflection process as well. The researcher not only had to reflect upon her interpretations of the data collected but also considered the opinions and reflections of the nine student-participants as well. Through this reciprocal reflection process, the researcher sought the opinions of the nine student-participants through a survey addressing how they liked or disliked learning the skill of rhyming through structured play and their opinions of the actual pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) that were chosen by the researcher and played during the Structured Play Unit.

Participants

The researcher's learning community consisted of twenty kindergarten students including eight male students and twelve female students. One of these student's ethnicity is Egyptian, three are black, four are Hispanic, and twelve are white. At the time of this action research study, sixteen students were five-years-old, and four students were

six-years-old. Seven out of the twenty students in the researcher's class receive free or reduced lunch.

The researcher is currently a kindergarten teacher at Eagle Elementary School (pseudonym) and acquired access to these student-participants because they were assigned to her kindergarten class for the 2017-2018 school year. The researcher then obtained permission from the parent(s)/guardian(s) of these twenty kindergarten students to proceed with this action research study. Permission was given by each parent/guardian for their child to participate. Although twenty kindergarten students were given the pre-test, only nine student-participants were included in the Structured Play Unit and post-test assessment. After analyzing the scores of the pre-test, the researcher noticed that only nine of the twenty students scored *no/little* or *some* on the pre-test and showed evidence of needing more instruction on the early literacy skill of rhyming. It was not necessary at the time of this study to have all students participate in the Structured Play Unit because the other eleven students scored *gaining* or *control* over the early literacy skill of rhyming. Please refer to Appendices B-F for more information on the rubric used to analyze the pre-test scores that determined eligibility for participation in the Structured Play Unit.

Characteristics of participants. There were four girls and five boys that participated in the Structured Play Unit. Student-participants range in age from five- to six-years-old. Each of the nine student-participants is unique in his/her own way.

Trent (pseudonym) is a reserved and soft-spoken five-year-old white male. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, he spent his time at home with his mother. He

is an only child and currently lives with his mother, but sees his father during his visitation times weekly. Academically, Trent is performing below-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations and participates in the Response to Intervention program at school. He also suffers from partial blindness in his left eye since birth.

Carson (pseudonym) is an enphatic and out-going five-year-old black male. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, he attended a local daycare while his mother worked. He has a younger brother and currently lives with his mother. Academically, Carson is performing on-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. He also enjoys telling stories about things that have happened to him and places he as visited.

Jenna (pseudonym) is a bubbly and sociable five-year-old white female. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, she attended the four-year-old kindergarten program at school while her mother and father worked. She has a younger sister and currently lives with both her mother and father. Academically, Jenna is performing on-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. She also enjoys writing.

Kay (pseudonym) is a free-spirited and fun-loving five-year-old white female. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, she attended a local daycare while her mother and father worked. She has a twin sister and currently lives with both her mother and father. Academically, Kay is performing below-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. She is also easily frustrated when challenges arise with her school work.

Simon (pseudonym) is a quiet and shy six-year-old Hispanic male. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, he attended the four-year-old kindergarten program at school while his mother and father worked. He has a younger brother and an older sister and currently lives with his mother and father. Academically, Simon participates in the English as a Second or Other Language program at school and performs below-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. Spanish was his first language spoken, and he also has trouble understanding spoken and written English.

Jane (pseudonym) is a confident and assertive five-year-old black female. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, she attended a local daycare while her mother and father worked. She has an older brother and currently lives with her mother and father. Academically, Jane is performing below-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. She also does not like to make mistakes in her school work.

Eve (pseudonym) is a lively and playful five-year-old white female. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, she attended a local daycare while her parents worked. She has an older brother and currently splits her time between her mother's home and her father's home. Academically, Eve is performing below-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. Eve also has a hard time completing work independently.

Kirk (pseudonym) is a calm and easygoing six-year-old Egyptian male. His mother and father were both born in Egypt. However, Kirk was born in America. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, he attended the four-year-old kindergarten

program at school while his mother and father worked. He has an older brother and currently lives with his mother and father. Academically, Kirk participates in the English as a Second or Other Language program at school and performs on-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. Arabic was his first spoken language, and he seems to understand spoken and written English well.

Cam (pseudonym) is a spirited and energetic five-year-old black male. Before beginning kindergarten in the Fall of 2017, he attended a local daycare while his mother and father worked. He is an only child and currently lives with his mother and father. Academically, Cam is performing on-grade level compared to district kindergarten expectations. He also enjoys reading.

Ethical protection. Approval from the University of South Carolina's Institutional Review Board (IRB) enabled the researcher to collect data from participants and to thoroughly explain this particular action research study to all members who gave their consent to participate. The planned action research study determined the effects of structured play on early literacy development (rhyming) in a kindergarten classroom. Ethics is a very important piece of action research studies. With so many things to consider, ethical guidelines can be an intricate part of any research project. The National Education Association's Code of Ethics states,

The educator, believing in the worth and dignity of each human being, recognizes the supreme importance of the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, and the nurture of the democratic principles. Essential to these goals is the protection of freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal educational opportunity

for all. The educator accepts the responsibility to adhere to the highest ethical standards. (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014, p. 148)

Moreover, it is the responsibility of the researcher to carry out research professionally and morally, respecting others' opinions and rights. It is of utmost importance to be courteous of the participants. The principal responsibilities to ensure human participant protection include: seeking permission with informed, voluntary consent, keep them from harm, and guarantee privacy throughout the study by using pseudonyms. Mohr states, "Teacher researchers are teachers first. They respect those with whom they work, openly sharing information about their research. While they seek knowledge, they also nurture the well-being of others, both students and professional colleagues" (Zeni, 1998, p. 17). The researcher was honest throughout the study and eliminated any racial, ethnic, and gender biases, not to disadvantage anyone by the research.

Reciprocal relationships with participants. Before this action research study, it was important for the researcher to build trust with the participants. At the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year, the researcher played team building games with the kindergarten class, allowed students to share some of their favorite items from home, and bring in family pictures to be displayed in the classroom to gain the trust of the student-participants. It was also important for the researcher, teacher assistant, and the twenty kindergarten students to work towards exhibiting a culture of kindness towards others daily and is cultivated through reading books and setting goals.

Setting

District. Eagle Elementary School (pseudonym), in the Creek School District (pseudonym), served as the setting for this action research study. The community surrounding this school district spans from rural to suburban. The size of district facilities covers three-hundred and sixty square miles and serves more than 25,000 students in grades Pre-Kindergarten through twelfth grades. There are seventeen elementary schools, seven middle schools, five high schools, one technology center, and an alternative school.

School. Eagle Elementary School (pseudonym) is composed of over seven-hundred and twenty students in Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grades. Throughout the researcher's career, she has taught Pre-Kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grades. Currently, the researcher's role is a general education kindergarten teacher at Eagle Elementary School. There are currently five kindergarten classes in the school. All subject areas are taught within the classroom, including, but not limited to, English/Language Arts, Math, Science/Health, and Social Studies. Students also participate in Music, Art, Media Center, Technology, and Physical Education each week. Most kindergarten-aged children are between the ages of five and six years old.

Classroom. The researcher's kindergarten classroom consists of a welcoming environment where students and teachers promote a kind and respectful culture. The researcher believes that it is a safe and secure setting for the students and teachers with age-appropriate furniture and manipulatives, a lock on the door, and security cameras. The classroom is organized and clean, conducive to hands-on learning. Centers are set up around the classroom for free-choice play exploration in math, writing, puzzles, reading,

alphabet, housekeeping, puppets, art, and blocks. A large carpet centers around the meeting area surrounded by the calendar and classroom library filled with picture books of all genres. Work areas with tables and chairs are used for whole group and small group instruction. The teacher and assistant meet with students in small groups and individually based on student needs. Student work is displayed throughout the classroom.

Kindergarten students aged five to six years old learn early numeracy skills in math, early reading and writing skills, science and social studies concepts, participate in centers, and have lunch and recess times throughout the school day. Instruction begins at 7:40 am and students are dismissed at 2:20 pm. During this time, students are talking and collaborating amongst their peers and their teachers. Books are read aloud by teachers to their students, and students are reading independently, with partners, and with their teachers. Music, singing, and movement are used to enhance concepts taught and for students to release energy which brings much laughter to the researcher's kindergarten classroom.

Instrumentation and Materials

Pre-test and post-test assessment. The researcher used the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA 2) written by Joetta M. Beaver (2005) as a method to collect pre-test and post-test data for this action research study. Beaver (2005), with other primary classroom teachers, field tested this program in classrooms across America and made revisions as necessary for this second edition before it was published. This reading program offers many different aspects to reading assessment and instruction. "The *DRA Word Analysis* is a diagnostic assessment that provides classroom and reading teachers

with a systematic means to observe how struggling and emerging readers attend to and work with the various components of spoken and written language” (Beaver, 2005, p. 4). The researcher chose to use the Word Analysis task on distinguishing pictured rhyming words for this action research study (Appendices B-E).

The objective of this task is “to identify a picture in a set that rhymes with the first picture” (Beaver, 2005, p. 30). The researcher then followed the explicit directions given by the manual. Each student-participant was shown the student task sheet with the picture cues (Appendix E). The researcher did a shared demonstration with each student-participant for two sample test items. After the shared demonstration, the researcher administered the remaining test items by stating each of the pictures in a set and instructed the student-participants to point out another picture in that set that rhymed with the first picture. Please see Appendix C for a full set of instructions on how the researcher administered the assessment.

Teacher journal and observations. A teacher journal was kept daily throughout the four-week data collection period to capture the researcher’s observations of the nine student-participants including my reflections on their moods and my perceptions of their levels of social engagement throughout the Structured Play Unit. Narrative descriptions of the rhyming games (Appendix I) and activities, student insights discussed with the teacher, and researcher reflections were recorded in the journal daily.

Student Survey. The researcher sought the opinions of the student-participants about their attitudes/feelings towards the Structured Play Unit and administered a survey to the nine student-participants (Appendix G). The researcher created a rating scale and

used it to gather this survey data by having the student-participants color a smiling face or a frowning face (Appendix G) to answer each question read aloud by the researcher. On the survey, there were two options for the nine student-participants. Each question focused on a single aspect of the Structured Play Unit's pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) that the students experienced.

Data Collection

Data was collected using quantitative methods to compare pre-test and post-test scores to measure student-participant progress. Using the Developmental Reading Assessment: Word Analysis (Appendices B-E), written by Beaver (2005), the researcher gave twenty students in the researcher's kindergarten classroom a pre-test: distinguishing pictured rhyming words. She then implemented a Structured Play Unit incorporating pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) and activities with nine kindergarten students for four weeks. After this four-week period in the Fall of 2017, the researcher administered the same assessment, previously given, as a post-test to measure student-participant progress. For this study, the researcher administered the pre-test and post-test as the same test, in the same manner. Both assessments were analyzed and reflected upon to determine if the implementation of structured play had an impact on the early literacy skill of phonological awareness encompassing rhyming.

Data Analysis and Reflection

Analysis. The focus of this action research study was to determine if the implementation of the Structured Play Unit affected the development of early literacy skills such as rhyming. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed. Once the researcher

collected the pre-test and post-test data for each of the nine student-participants, she subtracted the pre-test score from the post-test score to calculate the difference of each students' score. The difference of the pre-test score and the post-test score either showed a positive gain or a negative value indicating whether or not the implementation of structured play possibly had some impact on the early literacy skill of rhyming.

To further the analysis, the researcher used descriptive statistics to calculate the measure of central tendency by finding the mean of the pre-test scores and the mean of the post-test scores. The researcher also took this data and used a repeated-measures *t*-test, also known as the *t*-test for correlated means, that compared scores taken from the mean of the two assessments on the same selected group. Essentially, the pre-test mean was compared with the post-test mean. (Mertler, 2014, p. 176-177)

“The *t*-test for correlated means is used to compare the mean scores of the *same* group before and after a treatment of some sort is given, to see if any observed gain is significant, or when the research design involves two matched groups” (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2015, p. 236). Statistical software was used to calculate the p-value. The alpha significance level and the p-value determined if there was a significant statistical difference in the mean of the pre-test and post-test for the one selected group. The p-value was 0.0008 which was less than .05; therefore, the researcher concluded there was sufficient evidence to declare a difference in the two mean scores of the pre-test and post-test. The researcher concluded there was an impact on the early literacy skill of rhyming through the implementation of structured play. Additional analysis of the data is in chapter four.

The researcher did not encounter any discrepant cases with the exception of a student-participant whose pre-test and post-test score showed a negative difference, meaning that he did not progress on his identification of pictured rhyming words throughout the Structured Play Unit. This student is an English Language Learner, and the researcher felt that the language barrier created obstacles in his progress during the action research study.

Throughout the Structured Play Unit, the researcher used a teacher journal with color coding to reduce information into themes. *Conflict Resolution, Student Engagement and Building Confidence, Understanding Student Personalities, Eliminating Distractions, and Grouping* were all themes that emerged throughout the Structured Play Unit. Examples of these themes were highlighted in different colors in the teacher journal for organization and future reference.

Reflection. “Sharing the results of action research studies conducted by participant researchers can help reduce the gap that exists between research/theory and practical application in educational settings” (Mertler, 2014, p. 265). After conducting the study, it was most beneficial to share the results locally. The findings were shared with student-participants of the present study, as well as others, focusing on the privacy of the participants. The researcher first reflected on the findings of the study with the student-participants by discussing their post-test results with them and encouraging feedback through the completion of a student survey. The researcher felt that another audience that could benefit from the findings would be the teachers in her grade level. The present action research study was also presented to school administration, through a PowerPoint

presentation with all evidence included, for review of the effects of play on early literacy. School administration was encouraged to reflect on the data and participate in the action plan.

In the past, when the researcher has collaborated with professionals, she would hear educators emphasize results being found by others that do not directly relate to their classroom, school, and district. Mertler (2014) stated, “Research is routinely written and published in a way that does not consider a teacher’s typical day-to-day schedule” (p. 245). By sharing with colleagues on a daily basis, the researcher hoped for their reception and honesty about their beliefs. The researcher also considered how the study could directly effect their classrooms.

Conclusion

Through this action research study, the researcher collected and analyzed the quantitative data to see if the implementation of structured play had an effect on the development of the early literacy skill of rhyming with a group of kindergarten children. The use of quantitative data was most beneficial in the comparison of pre-test and post-test scores of the student-participants. Further, this action research plan provided the researcher with an avenue for sharing what she learned from conducting this study. In doing so, the researcher can lead other professionals to pursue an action research study about a problem they may have to affect change in their classroom, school, and/or district. Professional educators must risk everything for the success of their students and always work to grow and improve each day.

Chapter 4: Findings and Implications

Introduction

Chapter 4 outlines the findings and interpretation of the results for a quantitative action research study designed to answer the following research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* The researcher conducted this study in the Fall of 2017 at Eagle Elementary School (EES) (pseudonym), a suburban public school located in the Midlands region of South Carolina, with the community of learners consisting of nine kindergarten student-participants, in the researcher’s classroom. A Structured Play Unit enabled the student-participants to play pictured rhyming games to learn rhyming words (Appendix I). Data analysis of the nine student-participants’ pre-test and post-test scores are in this chapter.

The identified problem of practice focused on the development of an early childhood literacy curriculum and pedagogy that revolved around kindergarten students at EES through structured play. Currently, in the researcher’s school district, a heavy emphasis is being placed on rigorous “academic” activities for kindergarten such as English/Language Arts (ELA) and math skills.

Specific to early literacy, descriptive research shows that a literacy-in play strategy is effective in increasing the range and amount of literacy behaviors during play, thus allowing children to practice their emerging skills and show

what they have learned. Evidence is also accumulating that this strategy helps children learn important literacy concepts and skills, such as knowledge about the functions of writing, the ability to recognize play-related print, and comprehension strategies such as self-checking and self-correction. (Roskos, Christie, & Richgels, 2003, p. 7)

The purpose of the present action research study was to determine if the implementation of a Structured Play Unit with pictured rhyming words would increase the knowledge base of nine kindergarten students.

What is Structured Play?

Structured play, also referred to as *play with a purpose*, is a led, hands-on, activity with precise *learning objectives* as the focus. The learning objective for this Structured Play Unit was: *The students will be able to identify pictured rhyming words when playing rhyming games in a small group.*

The goal of structured play is to have fun while teaching. The purpose is to keep child[ren] active while learning! This type of play has many forms. It can be a physical or a mental challenge that ultimately teaches a new skill. (Rock, 2017, para. 1)

This action research study was intended to describe one local and particular study in the researcher's kindergarten classroom in the Fall of 2017 based on the rigorous South Carolina State Standards and district mandates that emphasize teaching kindergarten ELA concepts. One of the requirements of the ELA curriculum for kindergarten is to identify pictured rhyming words. The kindergarten researcher did not have a pedagogical plan in

place to teach this group of kindergarten students how to identify pictured rhyming words, so the researcher developed a Structured Play Unit that was implemented to test, through an action research paradigm, the effectiveness with local students.

Findings for this action research study include increased knowledge of pictured rhyming words, for the nine student-participants, due to the implementation of the Structured Play Unit by learning through experience. These student-participants did not receive any other instruction on pictured rhyming words before or throughout the four-week period. The researcher only used the pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) during the Structured Play Unit. The difference in the verbal pre-test scores and the verbal post-test scores showed that there was a positive impact on these scores based on the implementation of the Structured Play Unit. Additional information about the findings and interpretation of the data will be discussed further in this chapter.

Data Collection Strategy

Research setting. Through the theoretical lens of Montessori (1967), children must be given opportunities to explore their environment in-turn giving the teacher an opportunity to observe and better understand their needs. The researcher's kindergarten classroom consists of a welcoming environment where students and teachers promote a kind and respectful culture. Montessori believed that the classroom environment should be child-sized, structured, and organized. The researcher believes that her classroom is a safe and secure setting for the students and teachers with age-appropriate furniture and manipulatives, a lock on the door, and security cameras. The classroom is organized and clean, conducive to hands-on learning.

Montessori also believed that freedom to choose, within limits, and explorations to be essential in education. Centers are set up in the classroom for free-choice play, exploration in math, writing, puzzles, reading, alphabet, housekeeping, puppets, art, and blocks. These centers allow for freedom of choice and exploration, as well as, a time for the researcher to make observations and students to interact with peers. According to Dewey (1938), students are given opportunities in each center to read and write during play to help them see that it has a purpose in their life. Books, paper, and writing tools are included in each center.

A large carpet centers around the meeting area surrounded by the calendar and classroom library filled with picture books of all genres. The classroom uses work areas with tables and chairs for the whole group and small group instruction. The teacher and assistant meet with students in small groups and individually based on student needs. Student work is displayed throughout the classroom. Kindergarten students aged five to six years old learn early numeracy skills in math, early reading and writing skills, science and social studies concepts, participate in centers, and have lunch and recess times throughout the school day. Instruction begins at 7:40 am, and students are dismissed at 2:20 pm. In accordance with Dewey's progressivist theory, during this time, students are talking and collaborating amongst their peers and their teachers learning through discovery and social interaction. Books are read aloud by teachers to their students, and students are reading independently, with partners, and with their teachers. Music, singing, and movement are used to enhance concepts taught and for students to release energy which brings much laughter to the researcher's kindergarten classroom.

Quantitative data collection. This action research study attempted to answer the following question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* The four-week data collection period began with the researcher giving a verbal pre-test to twenty students in her kindergarten class. This test required students to identify pictures of rhyming words and point to their response to determine the selected group to participate prior to the treatment. The researcher analyzed the scores of the twenty kindergarten students and chose those who scored *no/little* or *some* knowledge of pictured rhyming words according to their pre-test score to participate in the treatment (Appendix D). The student-participants, nine students, known as the experimental group, took part in structured play activities which consisted of pictured rhyming games that involved matching rhyming pictures such as bear/pear, car/star, hat/cat. The students also played memory matching rhyming games, in addition to a game where students chose a picture and had to state another word that rhymed with it. (Appendix I) Afterward, the experimental group was given a verbal post-test to assess the effectiveness of the treatment on the early literacy skill of rhyming. Post-test data was analyzed to determine if there was possible growth in understanding the phonological skill of rhyming words greater than that of their pre-test score (Appendices B-E).

During the Structured Play Unit with the nine student-participants, six of the other students were working with the researcher's assistant on reading, and five of the other students were working on writing independently in the classroom. It is in the daily routine for all the students in the researcher's classroom to work in different small groups

with the teacher and assistant or independently each day. It is not unusual for students to work in small groups outside of the classroom daily. The researcher followed the classroom routine as normal, and the nine student-participants were not singled out from the other eleven students.

There was no direct instruction of rhyming words with the twenty kindergarten students in the researcher's classroom throughout this four-week period. The researcher used a pre-experimental design known as a one-group pretest-posttest design. Quantitative methods were used to primarily collect data to show whether the Structured Play Unit was effective in strengthening the early literacy skill of rhyming words through rhyming games. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the measure of central tendency for data analysis. A repeated-measures *t*-test compared scores taken from the mean of the pre-test and post-test assessments on the experimental group (Appendix H). The Structured Play unit was effective due to the hands-on experience with the pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) and the connection the student-participants made to the rhyming pictures that were *true*, *beautiful*, and *real* to five and six-year-old children (Dewey, 1938).

Student surveys were used to gather additional data on student opinions following the Structured Play Unit, prompting students to color the smiling face or frowning face when presented with the following questions: *Question 1-How did you feel about playing games with other students?; Question 2-How did you feel about playing games with other students and the teacher?; Question 3-How did you feel about playing rhyming game #1?; Question 4-How did you feel about playing rhyming game #2?; Question 5-How did*

you feel about playing rhyming game #3?; and Question 6-How did you feel about playing rhyming game #4? (Appendices G and I) The following section further explains how the student surveys were also used for qualitative data collection and analysis for triangulation of the data set.

Qualitative data collection. The researcher sought the opinions of the student-participants about their attitudes/feelings towards the Structured Play Unit and administered a survey to the nine student-participants. As the researcher, she needed to be sure that the various aspects, not just the reading level of the instrument, were appropriate for her students. A rating scale was used to gather this survey data by having the student-participants color a smiling face or a frowning face (Appendix G) to answer each question read aloud by the researcher. The survey gave two options to the nine student-participants. Each question focused on a single aspect of the Structured Play Unit's pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) that the students experienced. This information was used to collaborate with student-participants and to triangulate the quantitative data collected in the local and particular researcher's kindergarten classroom. The nine student-participants assisted the researcher in the analysis and reflection of the pedagogy used to increase the knowledge of the early literacy skill of pictured rhyming words. Action research methodology consists of a collaborative environment where the researcher can justify her teaching practices. (Mertler, 2014)

In addition to the student surveys, a teacher journal was kept daily throughout the four-week data collection period to capture the researcher's observations of the nine student-participants including my reflections on their moods and my perceptions of their

levels of social engagement throughout the Structured Play Unit. Narrative descriptions of the rhyming games (Appendix I) and activities, student insights discussed with the teacher, and researcher reflections were recorded in her journal daily and comprised the data set. Key questions were explored during the research process with the student-participants to create possible solutions for the following themes: *Conflict Resolution*, *Student Engagement and Building Confidence*, *Understanding Students' Personalities*, *Eliminating Distractions*, and *Grouping*.

Ongoing Analysis and Reflection

The researcher encountered several problems throughout the first two weeks of research while implementing the Structured Play Unit. Her preconceived notion was that the nine kindergarten student-participants, who scored low on the pre-test for pictured rhyming words, would already know how to *take turns* and *play the rhyming game* together cooperatively. However, the researcher noted in her teacher journal that she had to ask the group members several times to make sure they included everyone when playing the rhyming game. The researcher noted in the teacher journal: students continue to argue about whether the answer is correct or not, they are pulling picture cards out of each other's hands, and they are yelling at each other trying to argue their point. The next time the researcher implements the unit, she will need to enable the kindergarten students to understand the guidelines for structured play. The researcher and student-participants can decide them together as a group and write them down for all to follow. For example, *ask a friend to share* and *talk to friends for help*. The researcher now understands she

needs instructions about *how to play a game collaboratively* before letting kindergarten student-participants play rhyming games together in an active classroom setting.

Conflict resolution. Several of the nine student-participants settled conflicts by arguing and yelling at each other during disagreements while finding pictured rhyming word matches during the games. A goal is to enable these nine students to resolve conflicts without raising their voices. For example, aiding them in discussing their disagreement and teaching them better ways of resolving the conflict by talking instead of arguing and yelling with assistance from the guidance counselor. Throughout the last two weeks of the structured play unit, the researcher helped students to better communicate with each other by modeling appropriate ways to play games together. Through her observations, this strategy helped the nine student-participants to have fewer conflicts. The researcher noted in the teacher journal: since we reviewed how to treat others and state our opinions kindly, students are calmly making their claims as to why they think their answer is right versus their peer's choice with teacher reminders and assistance when needed. The researcher also noted that it seems the negative attitudes have subsided and student-participants are not taking the picture cards from their peers anymore.

Student engagement and building confidence. Some of the nine student-participants did not know how to engage in play. For example, Simon and Kirk (pseudonyms) sat back and watched others and waited for them to find a pictured rhyming match during the game. Jenna and Carson (pseudonyms) were two students who wanted to find all the answers and felt confident enough to do so by themselves while

playing the pictured rhyming game. The researcher split the student-participants into small groups and chose a pictured rhyming game where students had to take turns, and all could participate. Observations showed this helped with student engagement and the researcher was able to build confidence for all nine student-participants, with positive praise for participating in the Structured Play Unit.

Understanding student personalities. It became evident that conflicting personalities even at the age of five and six can be difficult to overcome to work together to find the matches to the rhyming word games. Students often looked to the researcher for reassurance and validation in their answers when playing games during the Structured Play Unit. Getting to know the students is key to teaching them. By fostering a positive community of learners and building relationships through mutual respect, trust, and commitment, everyone involved will feel more comfortable in participating in activities involving learning. “Students should learn how to ‘share their understandings and build on each other’s insights’ rather than being trained for a type of high-volume standardized production” (Leland & Kasten, 2002, p.10).

The students would have a voice in the classroom by becoming active participants in their knowledge gained. Conversations are a powerful teaching tool that can provide opportunities in the classroom for thinking and responding in a way that they can apply to real life situations outside of the school setting. (Oglan, 1999)

Eliminating distractions. It was very difficult for the researcher to focus her attention and observations with three small groups of three student-participants each at once. Each group worked together at the same time, and the classroom was loud and

distracting to the teacher and the student participants. The researcher recommends that if three groups work together on their rhyming games in the same space, that rules of *quietly speaking* be established prior to student activities. The researcher had the small groups work together in a side hallway to try and eliminate some of the distractions of other students in the classroom. Being in the hallway led to more challenges. Staff and other students walking by became distractions as well. Because of these distractions, the researcher was able to find a small room where she could shut the door to decrease outside distractions. Observations, recorded in the teacher journal, showed this small classroom was helpful in decreasing the number of distractions with each of the small groups and student-participants were more engaged in the pictured rhyming games.

Grouping. Vygotsky (1978) and Butler and Turbill (1984) believed that teachers must match learning to the child by giving them opportunities to participate. The environment is collaborative among the researcher and student-participants viewing learning as a social process. The student-participants have a voice in the classroom by becoming active participants in their knowledge gained.

Ability grouping refers to the process of teaching students in groups that are stratified by achievement, skill, or ability levels” (McCoach, O’Connell, & Levitt, 2006, p. 339). Furthermore, the researcher chose the nine student-participants from within her kindergarten classroom based on their pre-test scores before the treatment occurred.

In *within-class instructional grouping*, teachers create homogeneous groups within their heterogeneous classes. Teachers divide their time among the subgroups, providing adaptive instruction sensitive to the needs and abilities of

the group, while other groups engage in more non-directed instructional activities.

(p. 339)

To further help students with working collaboratively, the researcher felt it would be better for the nine kindergarten student-participants to be divided into one group of five students and one group of four students. These small groups then worked at separate times outside of the classroom with the researcher; however, both groups were still playing the same pictured rhyming games. “Ability grouping for reading instruction appears nearly universal, especially in the early grades” (p. 339). The researcher’s observations, recorded in her journal, showed that students placed into two separate groups were easier to monitor, participate, observe, and less distracting to others versus having three groups of three student-participants each at the same time.

Reflective Stance

Action research is cyclical and never-ending. The researcher recognized a focus area, collected data, analyzed the data, and developed an action plan to understand better and improve the quality of her teaching methods. The results remain local and specific to the researcher’s kindergarten classroom where she conducted the study to improve teaching practices. The researcher influenced the processes of teaching and learning through action research with her nine student-participants. The process is collaborative for the researcher, colleagues, and students. Action research is ultimately a method to improve educational practices by making changes (Mertler, 2014).

Several themes became evident throughout the four-week data collection period.

During the first week of data collection, the researcher placed students in three groups of

three student-participants each. It was difficult for the researcher to observe and participate with each of the small groups. A key question that became evident was *How should the teacher-researcher effectively group students for structured play?* The researcher wanted to ensure that each student-participant would have a fair and equal experience during the Structured Play Unit. The researcher must give students space and time in the classroom with the resources they need to enrich their literary experience through play. Children's knowledge of the play setting needs the teacher present to support and to guide the children through demonstration and collaboration (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). It was also evident that some of the student-participants were not going to be able to work with other group members due to a difference in student personalities. The researcher decided to split the nine kindergarten participants into one group of five students and one group of four students. Breaking the students into groups would allow the researcher to observe and participate in one group at a time, and be able to separate the students who were not getting along with each other. It would not be fair for the teacher, school, and district to assume students are entering kindergarten with the ability to display age-appropriate social skills. Students begin kindergarten on many different academic and social levels, and it is the responsibility of the researcher to know her students and their personalities to help with grouping and instruction.

Another key question that became evident in the first week of data collection was *How should the teacher-researcher eliminate distractions during the Structured Play Unit?* When working with five- and six-year-old student-participants, the researcher noted in the teacher journal that distractions, such as other students and teachers, outside

of working on the pictured rhyming game, prevented the student-participants from staying focused during the Structured Play Unit. When the data collection began, not only were all nine student-participants in the same area, but they were also working in a small narrow hallway near their classroom. The researcher noted in the teacher journal that the noise level was loud, and the students were not always focused or engaged in playing the pictured rhyming games. In addition to splitting up the groups differently, as stated above, the researcher also found a small empty classroom where she could shut the door and students could focus with their small group on the pictured rhyming games.

Data Analysis

Action research is cyclical at its core in that researchers are expected to be constant vehicles of change. Action research gives educators who aim to research their classrooms this avenue to address questions and problems that they face and to continually reflect upon their local and particular teaching practices to achieve a goal. “[E]very classroom teacher should be to improve her or his professional practice as well as student outcomes. Action research is an effective means by which this can be accomplished” (Mertler, 2014, p. 13).

Action research incorporates collaborative and reflective processes that are thoughtfully planned and cyclical by nature bringing about a “justification of one’s teaching practices” (p. 21). The researcher talked softly and was encouraging to all student-participants to ensure the children felt comfortable working with the researcher and other students throughout the Structured Play Unit. Data were collected dependably and accurately because the researcher did not deviate from the written directions of the

pre-test and post-test assessments, and the directions or questions on the student survey, to ensure the researcher asked each of the nine student-participants the same things.

Quantitative data: Pre-test data and post-test data. The researcher gave a verbal pre-test to twenty kindergarten students in the researcher’s class (Appendices B-F). This data was used to determine which students participated in the Structured Play Unit (see Table 4.1). Names shown in the table are pseudonyms.

Table 4.1

Pre-test Data Results (Administered on August 30th, 2017)

No/Little	Some	Gaining	Control
Kay	Carson	John	Mae
Eve	Cam	Liz	Melissa
	Jane	Eliana	Finn
	Jenna	Natalie	Susan
	Kirk	Chelsea	
	Simon	Ava	
	Trent	Bill	

Nine out of twenty kindergarten students who scored *no/little* or *some* were chosen to participate in the four-week Structured Play Unit. During this unit, the student-participants played rhyming games that consisted of matching rhyming pictures such as bear/pear, car/star, hat/cat, etc. The students also played memory matching rhyming games in addition to a game where students chose a picture and had to state another word

that rhymed with it. (Appendix I) At the end of the four-week Structured Play Unit, the researcher administered the verbal post-test to the nine student-participants, which was the same as the verbal pre-test (Appendices B-F). The data was used to determine if structured play had an impact on the early literacy skill of rhyming (see Table 4.2).

Names in the table are pseudonyms. Eight is the highest that a student can score on the assessment. Eight out of nine student-participants showed a positive gain between their pre-test and post-test scores. One of the nine student-participants showed a negative difference between his pre-test and post-test score.

Table 4.2

Pre-test and Post-test Scores (Post-test administered on September 28th, 2017)

Student Names	Pre-Test Scores	Post-Test Scores	Difference
Carson	4	8	+4
Cam	4	8	+4
Jenna	4	8	+4
Kirk	3	8	+5
Jane	4	7	+3
Kay	2	7	+5
Trent	3	5	+2
Eve	1	4	+3
Simon	5	4	-1

Student surveys: Student surveys (Appendix G) showed nine out of nine positive student opinions indicated by a colored smiling face for the following questions:

Question 1-How did you feel about playing games with other students?; Question 5-How did you feel about playing rhyming game #3?; and Question 6-How did you feel about playing rhyming games #4? Student surveys (Appendices G and I) showed eight out of nine positive student opinions indicated by a colored smiling face for the following questions: *Question 2-How did you feel about playing games with other students and the teacher?* and *Question 3-How did you feel about playing rhyming game #1?* Student surveys (Appendix G) showed seven out of nine positive student opinions indicated by a colored smiling face for the following question: *Question 4-How did you feel about playing rhyming game #2?* The following section further explains how the student surveys were also used for qualitative data collection and analysis for triangulation of the data set.

Qualitative data: Student surveys. The researcher administered a survey to each of the nine student-participants (Appendix G). The researcher asked each student six different questions, in which they marked a smiling face or a frowning face depending on how they felt about the question. The nine student-participants were also shown each of the pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) to ensure they knew which pictured rhyming game the researcher was referring to when asking each question. Six out of nine student-participants colored all smiling faces for the six questions asked. Some of the student-participants shared the following negative comments while participating in their student survey. Cam (pseudonym) did not like one of the matching rhyming games stating, “it was so hard. . . I couldn’t figure nothing out.” Jane (pseudonym) did not like playing the rhyming game with other students and the teacher stating, “because they are so hard.”

Jane preferred playing with other students only. She also marked one of the matching pictured games with a frowning face and stated, “that one was so hard, and there are a lot of cards.” Kay (pseudonym) did not like the memory match rhyming game stating, “I didn’t pick the right ones.” However, overall the other comments from the student-participant survey results were more positive than negative. (Appendix G) The researcher realized, based upon the few negative comments above, that it may have been helpful to have the student-participants involved in picking the rhyming games that they would play during the Structured Play Unit.

Teacher journal. The researcher kept a teacher journal throughout the four-week Structured Play Unit to record observations of the nine student-participants including her reflections on their moods and her perceptions of their levels of social engagement. Five themes developed throughout the four-week data collection period: *Conflict Resolution*, *Student Engagement and Building Confidence*, *Understanding Student Personalities*, *Eliminating Distractions*, and *Groupings*. The first week, the researcher grouped students into three groups of three student-participants. The researcher recorded in the teacher journal that Eve (pseudonym) began arguing with her small group saying, “that is wrong” and yelling at the other two students in her group. Simon and Kirk (pseudonyms) did not know how to engage in play. They sat back and watched others and waited for another student to find the rhyming match. Jenna and Carson (pseudonyms) were two students who often found all the pictured rhyming word matches and felt confident in their answers. Through these interactions, the importance of building a positive community of learners was evident to the researcher. Student-participants were also often distracted by

other teachers and students in the hallway. Therefore, the researcher found a small room where the door could be closed to decrease outside distractions. Student grouping was also helpful in eliminating some distractions as well. The researcher recorded in the teacher journal that student-participants were often saying “it’s too loud,” or “I can’t think.” The researcher regrouped student-participants into one group of five students and one group of four students. These groupings offered students less noise and people in the same space. Smaller groups also allowed the researcher to observe each student and their comments closely.

Reflection of data with students. After administering the post-test, the researcher sat down with each of the nine student-participants to discuss their pre-test and post-test scores. For those students that scored below an eight on the post-test, the researcher discussed the correct answers for the ones the student-participant missed on the assessment. Due to the age of the participants, it was most helpful for them to visualize what the correct answers were so we looked at the assessment together. The researcher sat down with each of the student-participants individually to administer the student survey. The researcher discussed each game, and the student-participants could see each game that they played, portray their feelings, and comment to describe how they felt and why.

Coding

This action research study examined the effects of structured play on the early literacy skill of rhyming. Nine students participated in structured play pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) for a four-week period. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze

the data collected through a pre-test and post-test. The descriptive data analysis revealed that the Structured Play Unit did have a positive effect on the early literacy skill of rhyming. In a teacher journal kept by the researcher, she recorded observations and highlighted common topics in different colors to reveal themes during the data collection period. The following patterns emerged regarding structured play (not rhyming per se) throughout the four-week data collection period:

1. Conflict Resolution
2. Student Engagement and Building Confidence
3. Understanding Student Personalities
4. Elimination Distractions
5. Grouping

Student surveys were also used to reflect with the nine student-participants upon the data collected to discuss student perceptions about the Structured Play Unit and pictured rhyming games (Appendix I). Different colors were used to code the questions that students marked with a smiling face versus the questions marked with a frowning face. The researcher could see which students had a more positive response to the Structured Play Unit and those students who thought negatively about a few aspects of the unit. After brainstorming with the student-participants, the researcher realized that students need to be involved in the rhyming game selection for the Structured Play Unit for the student-participants to buy in to playing the games and feel they have some input in the process of game selection.

Data Interpretation

Using a pre-experimental design known as a one-group pretest-posttest design, the researcher used quantitative methods to primarily collect data to show whether the Structured Play Unit was effective in strengthening the early literacy skill of rhyming words through pictured rhyming games (Mertler, 2014). The data was used to determine if the structured play had an impact on the early literacy skill of rhyming. Names in the table are pseudonyms. Eight out of nine student-participants showed a positive gain between their pre-test and post-test scores (Table 4.3.). One of nine student-participants showed a negative difference between his pre-test and post-test score. Simon (pseudonym) is a student that participates in the English for Speakers of Other Languages program three days per week outside of the regular kindergarten classroom. Through the researcher's observations, during the Structured Play Unit, she felt that Simon had trouble understanding and pronouncing some of the pictured rhyming words which may have possibly influenced his scores.

Table 4.3

Pre-test and Post-test Scores (Post-test administered on September 28th, 2017)

Student Names	Pre-Test Scores	Post-Test Scores	Difference
Carson	4	8	+4
Cam	4	8	+4
Jenna	4	8	+4
Kirk	3	8	+5
Jane	4	7	+3
Kay	2	7	+5
Trent	3	5	+2
Eve	1	4	+3
Simon	5	4	-1

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the measure of central tendency for data analysis using the Minitab Express Software program (Appendix H). A repeated-measures *t*-test compared scores taken from the mean of the pre-test and post-test assessments on the experimental group and revealed a value of -5.21 (Mertler, 2014). The null hypothesis is there is no difference between a pre-test on rhyming words with no structured play instruction and a post-test on rhyming words with structured play instruction. The *p*-value was 0.0008. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis is, there is a difference. Since the *p*-value is less than .05, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there is no difference. However, there is evidence to support there is a difference between the pre-test on rhyming words with no structured play instruction and a post-test on rhyming words with structured play instruction. Please refer to table 4.4 and Appendix H for further analysis.

Table 4.4

Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Sample	N	Mean	SE Mean
Pre-Test	9	3.3333	0.4082
Post-Test	9	6.5556	0.5800

The researcher understands what each group and individual brings to the educational experience. The present educational moment can affect all future moments in the researcher's kindergarten classroom for future students so both the past and the future matter to the present. Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978) believed the educational experience of a student arises from the interaction between a student's past and present situation. According to these theorists, it is the responsibility of the teacher to understand

the dynamics of the past-present-future interactions to construct and facilitate educational experiences which will provide maximum benefit both in the present and in the future for the students who are in the researcher's care. The researcher was able to use a pre-test to see what students already knew about rhyming words before any treatment. She then used the Structured Play Unit to teach students further how to identify pictured rhyming words. Through this unit, students not only gained knowledge of pictured rhyming words they could use when learning to read but also conflict resolution skills for working with others that they can use in the future. According to Dewey (1938), education is and should be about living. The role of the teacher was similar to a midwife in that the teacher helps the student *give birth* to new knowledge, but the teacher cannot do it for the student. The teacher can only guide, and this task is fraught with difficulty drama, and risk much like giving birth. The role of the researcher during the Structured Play Unit was to guide and support the students while playing the pictured rhyming games. Through this guidance and co-constructed learning, there is an increase in the students' level of knowledge with pictured rhyming words because they are working with the researcher whose competence level with this subject is higher than that of the student participants (Vygotsky, 1978). Throughout the unit, the students had difficulty matching rhyming words, and there was drama between students that disagreed with each other, as well as students taking risks with their answers and discussions. The researcher also does not agree with the district and state mandates when they want to test the youngest kindergarten learners. As educators, it is necessary to meet students where they are in their educational learning. The researcher understands the need to balance what is

mandated by the state with structured play and free choice play to work out social interactions and thus learn the material mandated to educators, such as rhyming words, while still holding true to what she knows to be developmentally appropriate for kindergarteners (Dewey, 1938).

Answering the Research Question

The present action research study attempted to answer the following question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* Currently, in the researcher's early childhood classroom, the curriculum is heavily focused on academics, such as English/Language Arts and Math. Students, especially in kindergarten, need to be engaged in the classroom environment through socialization and instruction. The young children in the researcher's classroom need opportunities to play and experience learning through discovery. The researcher nurtured students by developing instruction through a Structured Play Unit that was developmentally appropriate. Most importantly, an action research model was used to seek an answer to the above research question that was meaningful to the researcher's kindergarten classroom and to find a possible solution to the above problem (Mertler, 2014).

Answer to the research question. After the researcher administered the pictured rhyming words pre-test orally, nine kindergarten students participated in the Structured Play Unit for a four-week period by playing pictured rhyming games (Appendix I) with small groups of students and the researcher. After the treatment, the researcher gave nine kindergarten student-participants an oral pictured rhyming words post-test to determine if

the Structured Play Unit had an impact on the pictured rhyming words assessment. The answer to the research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* was determined in the local researcher's classroom that the Structured Play Unit had a positive effect when comparing the student-participant's pre-test and post-test scores. The researcher offered no direct instruction on rhyming words prior to the treatment for the nine student-participants; therefore, the student-participants were only experiencing instruction on pictured rhyming words by the researcher during the Structured Play Unit at school. In addition to the quantitative data analysis, the researcher triangulated the data set by using a teacher journal and student surveys to record the student's perceptions of the Structured Play Unit. Overall, the students showed positive perceptions of the Structured Play Unit based on the researcher's observations and the student surveys.

This unit has changed the outlook of the researcher by showing, through the data collected, that structured play had a positive effect on the early literacy skill of rhyming. Therefore, the researcher will use this type of pedagogy in the future to teach other students about early literacy skills despite district and state mandates of rigorous curricula for our youngest learners. Eisner (2001) encouraged researchers to see that the need for school reform is real. Currently, schools and districts use assessments as a way to measure the progress and achievement of students based on their knowledge of the standards. Due to the pressure of teaching mandated standards and high-stakes testing, school experiences are not what they should be. "Tests come to define our priorities" (p. 281). The field of education is losing sight of developmentally appropriate practices for

our youngest children in the public-school setting. Play is becoming less of what others see as a necessity in the classroom due to rigorous mandated standards and high-stakes testing. Based on the unit, data collected, and student perspectives discussed, using games to teach early literacy skills would make life in the classroom better for the students in the researcher's care. The students are obtaining knowledge through play and discovery with the researcher as the guide for the student-participant's learning, and where testing is not a priority (Eisner, 2001).

New possibilities. Action research methods are at their heart reflective processes in that researchers engage in instructional strategies and implement units with the analysis of data collected with student-participants and researchers. The iterations that occur with each new data collection and analysis cycle continually add to the renewal and revitalization of the classroom for students (Mertler, 2014). Through this action research study, the researcher found new possibilities for the learning community of student-participants that could be used to implement the Structured Play Unit with future research better. By first completing direct lessons on pictured rhyming words as a whole class lesson and then using the Structured Play Unit on pictured rhyming words to help with strengthening this early literacy skill, the whole kindergarten classroom would receive direct instruction by the researcher before she conducted a Structured Play Unit. A pre-test would then be given to determine which students needed extra help with learning rhyming words. The students selected would then participate in the Structured Play Unit with a small group of students and the researcher for further instruction on pictured rhyming words. At this point, a post-test would be given to determine if the Structured

Play Unit had a positive or negative impact on the post-test scores. Since action research is a cyclical process, the researcher would gather more key questions for future research to refine her pedagogy. Vygotsky (1978) and Butler and Turbill (1984) explained that learning must match to each child by giving them opportunities to participate. The classroom environment is collaborative among the researcher and students viewing learning as a social process.

Another possibility would be to acclimate students to structured play before using it as a teaching tool. Students would learn about conflict resolutions and how to work with others when playing a game like taking turns and having conversations. Student-participants would learn to respect other's opinions and talk through their differences. Teachers must rid the classroom environment and teaching practices of stereotypes and cultural bias. Discussions must include an open conversation with the students and teachers. A non-threatening classroom environment coupled with a respectful classroom community would encourage students to have a voice and discuss with others their opinions on different topics. "This stance forces us to acknowledge and confront the questions and challenges that emerge when we make space in the curriculum for children's voices" (Mills, Stephens, O'Keefe, & Waugh, 2004, p. 49). Giving students an opportunity to speak out about their concerns and opinions could bring up conflict, but students need to learn that this is okay when discussion and not ignorance or violence surround it.

Conclusion

The researcher's kindergarten classroom, where this action research study took place, is a welcoming environment where twenty kindergarten students, a teacher, and a teaching assistant are equals in learning. The materials are age-appropriate and organized for hands-on learning. Through this action research study, the researcher's concern for developmentally appropriate practices in her kindergarten classroom, being dismantled by rigorous district and state expectations, led to the following research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* The quantitative data collected and analyzed determined the Structured Play Unit had an overall positive effect on the local researcher's kindergarten classroom based on the pre-test and post-test scores, as well as student-participant perspectives throughout the four-week data collection period. In chapter five, the researcher will outline an action plan for possible future research.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Action Plan

Introduction

Chapter five summarizes the findings and concludes a quantitative action research study from the Fall of 2017 at Eagle Elementary School (pseudonym), a suburban public school located in the Midlands region of South Carolina. The community of learners consisted of nine student-participants in the researcher's kindergarten classroom. The problem of practice centers around district and state mandates heavily focused on rigorous academics such as English/Language Arts (ELA) and math skills with little regard to developmentally appropriate practices. NAEYC stated that developmentally appropriate practices include,

Kindergarten teachers must fully engage in the social world of the classroom and be intentional in their interactions and instruction. With many differences among—and wide age range of—kindergarteners, teachers should be responsive to developmental, individual, and cultural variation. Thoughtful, sensitive teaching promotes a joy of learning and prepares children for further academic challenges. (n.d., para. 6)

This action research study was designed to answer the following research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* The purpose of this action research study was to determine if the use of structured play, to teach pictured rhyming words, would

increase the knowledge base of nine kindergarten students. Nancy Carlsson-Paige stated, “Play is the primary engine of human growth; it’s universal – as much as walking and talking. Play is the way children build ideas and how they make sense of their experience and feel safe” (as cited in Strauss, 2015, November 24, para. 11).

The methodology for this quantitative action research study included the researcher’s kindergarten class of twenty students. These students were all given a verbal pre-test to determine who would participate in the Structured Play Unit. Nine student-participants scored *no/little* or *some* according to the rubric and participated in the four-week Structured Play Unit (Appendix D). Throughout the four-week data collection period, the nine student-participants played pictured rhyming games that consisted of matching rhyming pictures such as *bear/pear, car/star, hat/cat, etc.* The students also played memory matching rhyming games in addition to a game where students chose a picture and had to state another word that rhymed with it. (Appendix I) During this data collection period, students did not have any direct instruction by the researcher on pictured rhyming words. At the end of the unit, the nine student-participants were given a verbal post-test to determine if the structured play had any impact on their knowledge of pictured rhyming words. Descriptive statistics and a *t*-test for correlated means were used to determine that the Structured Play Unit had a positive effect when comparing the pre-test and post-test scores. (Mertler, 2014) Student-participants scores exhibited a positive increase, therefore, showing growth in their knowledge gained of pictured rhyming words; more in-depth information is in chapter four. Mertler (2014) explained,

Reflection is about learning from the critical examination of your own practice but also about taking the time to critically reexamine exactly *who* was involved in the process, *what* led you to want to examine this aspect of your practice, *why* you chose to do what you did, *where* is the appropriate place to implement future changes, and *how* this has impacted your practice. (p. 258)

The researcher shared the reciprocal data analysis of the findings with the student-participants. By completing a rating scale, the nine kindergarten student-participants were able to share their thoughts on the Structured Play Unit and the pictured rhyming games (Appendix I). Student comments such as: “I like working together,” “we did it together like teamwork,” “I like this game; it was fun matching the rhyming words,” and “this game is fun” show an overall positive perception of the Structured Play Unit. The comments from the nine student-participants were based on the researcher’s observations recorded in the teacher journal and their student surveys which were marked with smiling faces instead of frowning faces. The researcher used the pre-test and post-test scores, as well as, the teacher journal and student surveys to triangulate the data collected and to analyze the outcome of this action research study.

Within chapter five, the reader will also find an action plan designed to implement structured play in the researcher’s kindergarten classroom with future research. Key questions that emerged from the findings and the role of the action researcher as a curriculum leader in the data collection are addressed. The development of the action plan includes what the researcher learned from the study in reciprocity with student-participants, a summary of the research findings, and suggestions for future research.

Key Questions

Several themes became evident throughout the four-week data collection period: *Conflict Resolution, Student Engagement and Building Confidence, Understanding Students' Personalities, Eliminating Distractions, and Grouping*. Since action research is cyclical, the researcher felt the following key question could be explored with future research: *How should the teacher-researcher effectively group students for structured play?* The researcher noted in the teacher journal that students' personality conflicts were causing arguments among some of the student-participants when participating as three small groups of three students each at the same time. Structure play is conducive to Dewey's Progressivist Theory because children develop social skills through hands-on collaborative group work guided by the teacher. The researcher and student-participants would be centrally involved in the future research with diverse resources the researcher provided with the assistance of the student-participants choosing the games to play during the Structured Play Unit based on their interests. Dewey (1938) also believed that educators should look ahead to the future needs of society; therefore, through structured play, student-participants can learn to effectively communicate and collaborate with the researcher and their peers to enable them these skills needed in the future.

Another key question that became evident and could be explored with future research: *How should the teacher-researcher eliminate distractions during the Structured Play Unit?* The researcher noted in the teacher journal that students were easily distracted when participating in the Structured Play Unit in the hallway outside of the classroom where all nine student-participants were working in the same small space. The researcher

also noted in the teacher journal that the noise level was loud and the students were not always focused or engaged in the pictured rhyming game due to other students and teachers being in the hallway during this time. The researcher and student-participants would be centrally involved in the future research with diverse resources the researcher provided, spending more time with helping student-participants to understand their role in the structured play. The researcher understands that some children do not come to kindergarten with the understanding of how to participate in structured play and this would present a challenge.

Dewey (1938) and Montessori (1967) explained that students should experience learning through their interests and inquiry developing ideas about the relevance of the material to their lived world experiences. Although excellent in theory, currently in the researcher's school district, flexible curriculum, student inquiry and interests, and learning through discovery are not portrayed as a priority for classroom instruction, and this presents an immense challenge. Leading to an additional key question: *What do teachers need to adopt progressivist pedagogy within an essentialist school?* Moreover, there has been much debate for centuries around scripted instruction in the past and continues in education today. Originally Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori's methods were disapproved "for rigidly prescribing how teachers taught and children learned" (Beatty, 2011, p. 395). "Froebelian kindergarten and Montessori were conceived as liberating alternatives to traditional pedagogy. Froebel promoted play rather than academics; Montessori emphasized children's independent work with materials at the students' own pace" (Beatty, 2011, p. 398). Beatty (2011) also set out to research

teacher's perceptions towards scripted instruction looking at the four methods mentioned above concluding,

In my experience, it takes content and pedagogical knowledge, practice, feedback, support, and time to develop a deep repertoire of teaching skills. With continuing pressure from accountability-driven education policy, rapid churning of instructional models, spread of scripting, and growth of alternative teacher certification, more new teachers may be caught in Anne Durst's and Donna Moffett's dilemma, of resenting the imposition of scripted instruction yet feeling overwhelmed by devising new curricula and instructional methods of their own, a dilemma to which policymakers and educators should be more responsive. (p. 421)

Beatty (2011) recommended, based on her study, that *script developers* give more autonomy to teachers by giving them choices of which scripts to use and freedom in changing them based on the needs and interests of the students.

In the future, the researcher would like to incorporate more student interests by having them choose the pictured rhyming games to be played based on their interests. Through action research and sharing the findings of this study and future studies, the researcher hopes to show colleagues and administration the importance of changing pedagogy and using structured play as a means to teach the rigorous mandated ELA curriculum in a more developmentally appropriate way framed around Dewey's progressivist theory. The researcher understands that administration could have questions about this pedagogy such as: How will you ensure that your students are learning early

literacy skills (ex. Rhyming) when using structured play? They may also ask to see more information about Dewey's Progressivist Theory and how other teachers have used it in their classrooms. It is the understanding of the researcher that action research is done to make a change for the betterment of the students in her classroom, but unfortunately, it will be a great challenge to change the minds of administration from their current narrowed view of developmentally appropriate pedagogies for our youngest learners. It is, however, the responsibility of the researcher to ask the hard questions about issues and problems in her classroom and then work to collect the data to try and find possible answers to those questions ultimately improving the life of the children in the researcher's care. Please refer to chapter two for more information about Dewey's Progressivist Theory and other theorist related to this framework.

The original problem of practice, district and state rigorous academic mandates in ELA and math for our youngest learners with little regard to developmentally appropriate practices, continues to be evident in the researcher's school and kindergarten classroom after this action research study. The researcher feels it would be important to continue further research on the effects of structured play as a pedagogy to help student-participants learn the state-mandated ELA skills. Through this quantitative action research study, data analysis showed the overall positive effect of using the Structured Play Unit to teach the early literacy skill of phonological awareness encompassing pictured rhyming words. Rudnitski (1994) stated that,

Educators today take for granted the ideas that children learn through play, and that their health and home lives affect their later success in school. We take for

granted the ideas that each child is an individual, and that children learn democratic principles through their interactions in school. (p. 33)

It would be interesting for the researcher to continue her research to see if the structured play affected other early literacy skills and how another action research study could be conducted in a different way using the key questions at the beginning of this section to drive her future research.

Action Research

“Teachers must be able and willing to critically examine their own practice as well as how students (both collectively and individually) learn best” (Mertler, 2014, p. 12). The researcher’s role as a curriculum leader is to stay involved, have a vision, think ahead, and set new directions. Curriculum leaders help others to buy in through inspiration, motivation and creating change. (Zaleznik, 2004) As the researcher, my role was to serve as both an *insider* and an *outsider* throughout this action research study. The researcher chose the research question: *How does the implementation of a Structured Play Unit impact early literacy skills (rhyming) on kindergarten students?* Based on the needs of the students in her classroom. The pre-test and post-test were also chosen by the researcher to provide evidence of if the Structured Play Unit effected the early literacy skill (rhyming), (Appendices B-F). The researcher collected the data in conjunction with the student-participants, and the data was analyzed and reflected upon with the nine student-participants, colleagues, and administration.

The *insider* role of the researcher consisted of sharing with the student-participants by partaking in subjective discussions and playing the pictured rhyming

games during the data collection through the Structured Play Unit. The *outsider* role of the researcher was consistently objective and comprised of recording her observations of the student participants' comments, reactions, and feelings throughout the Structured Play Unit. This *outsider* role was also evident during the data analysis by collecting and reviewing the pre-test and post-test scores as well as the analysis of the researcher's observations from the teacher journal.

Reflective teaching is a process of developing lessons or assessing student learning with thoughtful consideration of educational theory, existing research, and practical experience, along with the analysis of the lesson's effect on student learning. This process of systematically collecting information followed by active reflection – all with the anticipation of improving the teaching process – is at the core of action research. (Mertler, 2014, p. 13)

Both the *insider* and *outsider* roles were evident during the reciprocal reflection process as well. The researcher not only had to reflect upon her interpretations of the data collected but also considered the opinions and reflections of the nine student-participants as well. Through this reciprocal reflection process, the researcher sought the opinions of the nine student-participants through a survey addressing how they liked or disliked learning the skill of rhyming through structured play and their opinions of the actual pictured rhyming games that were chosen by the researcher and played during the Structured Play Unit (Appendices G and I).

“Action Research affords teachers opportunities to connect theory with practice, to become more reflective in their practice, and to become empowered risk takers”

(Mertler, 2014, p. 26). The researcher felt that action research has given her an avenue to study a more developmentally appropriate pedagogy for teaching kindergarteners early literacy skills (rhyming). However, there were obstacles the researcher had to face throughout the data collection period and continue to face when examining ideas for future research. One obstacle the researcher continues to face is the rigorous academic standards set forth by the state and reinforced by her district. Dewey's progressivist theory conveys to us that students should be exposed to a flexible curriculum that is highly personalized using diverse resources that incorporate student inquiry and interests. Unfortunately, the researcher is expected to follow her district's curriculum map of what to teach with the materials given by the district, how to teach it, and when to teach it; this is far from a flexible curriculum. The researcher would like to further her research to show administration how using appropriate pedagogies such as structured play to teach these rigorous ELA standards to our youngest learners is developmentally appropriate. Another obstacle the researcher must face is that diverse resources are not readily available due to lack of funding and may require the researcher to write a grant to obtain the funding needed to gather these materials to further this type of action research study.

Developing the Action Plan

Within the developing stage of action research, Mertler (2014) tells the reader, "The action plan is essentially a proposed strategy for implementing the results of your action research project" (p. 43). Since the results showed evidence that the implementation of structured play on early literacy skills (rhyming) had a positive impact, the researcher has planned to implement structured play on a regular basis in her

kindergarten classroom. Essentially, the results of the data collected has led to further research questions, to gather more information on the suggested topic. The researcher understands that action research is cyclical. However, it is still important for educators to share and communicate the results of their study with the participants, as well as others indicated in the study (Mertler, 2014). Through reciprocity with the kindergarten student-participants, the researcher has learned they enjoyed the Structured Play Unit based on their positive student surveys. The researcher has also shared the findings with her kindergarten teacher colleagues in a grade-level meeting as evidence of using different pedagogy to developmentally appropriately teach the rigorous ELA state standards and meet district expectations. Based on the need for more developmentally appropriate pedagogy, the researcher has developed an action plan including modifications to the Structured Play Unit in accordance with the student-participants and kindergarten team colleagues which will be discussed further in the next section.

The Action Plan

Through this action research study, the researcher has decided to work towards changing kindergarten pedagogies to be more developmentally appropriate using structured play. The researcher has incorporated much research in this study *The Play-Literacy Nexus and the Importance of Evidence-Based Techniques in the Classroom* by Roskos and Christie (2011) stated,

One of the more robust findings in play, literacy research suggests that a literacy-enriched play environment promotes literacy behaviors. Stocking the environment with literacy materials and tools stimulates literacy instruction in the course of

play. Adult involvement and intervention infuse literacy concepts and skills into play activity, and children share literacy knowledge and processes with one another in their play episodes. Many of these studies show the large impact that enriched play settings have on literacy versus non-enriched play settings, reporting the benefits of literacy-enriched play for children's literacy exposure, knowledge (e.g., print awareness), and range of experience (e.g., functional print), especially in the preschool years. This research demonstrates an argument ecological psychologists have long made: the environment informs and shapes behavior. (p. 211)

The researcher feels that it will be crucial to continue to study the effectiveness of structured play in her kindergarten classroom to gather more information and data which would eventually provide a clearer paradigm for changing the kindergarten pedagogies throughout the researcher's school and possibly district. (Mertler, 2014)

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2014) stated, "The compass that provides the direction or question for your inquiry comes from critical reflection in and on your own teaching practice" (p. 30). After presenting the findings to colleagues and a period of reflection, the researcher realized the still difficult tasks of administering state assessments, teaching state standards, and getting children ready for first grade. After some self-reflection and more research, the researcher began to fully comprehend the impact the government has on education, which, in turn, filters through to districts, schools, educators, and students. The researcher's kindergarten colleagues are feeling forced, by legislation, to abandon developmentally appropriate practices to make the adequate progress on assessments.

The aim was then, and is today, to systematize and standardize so that the public will know which schools are performing well and which are not. There were to be then, and there are today, payments and penalties for performance. (Eisner, 2001, p. 279)

Due to the pressures of teaching mandated standards and high-stakes testing, school experiences are not what they should be. One of the first developmentally appropriate learning practices to be abandoned by the kindergarten teacher colleagues is play. According to Rock (2017), structured play, also referred to as “play with a purpose,” is a teacher-led, hands-on, activity with a precise *learning objective* as the focus. This type of play has many forms. It can be a physical or mental challenge that ultimately teaches a new skill. “The goal of structured play is to have fun while teaching.” The purpose is to keep “child[ren] active while learning!” (para. 1) In the researcher’s experiences working with young children, phonological awareness is very important to the development of early literacy skills. More specifically, the researcher has decided to further study the implementation of structured play to determine the effect it has on the early literacy skill of phonological awareness. Through this action plan, the researcher will modify the previous action research study to gather more information to determine if structured play positively affects the scores of the kindergarten students when given a rhyming assessment with modifications made to the Structured Play Unit.

I will begin this modified Structured Play Unit with a new group of kindergarten students in the Fall of 2018. The researcher will be responsible for conducting the second action research cycle continuing from the previous study. The researcher will contact

district and administrators, as well as, parents/guardians for permission to do the action research study in the researcher's kindergarten classroom, as well as, for each child to participate in the study. The researcher will monitor and collect the data for the second phase of this action researcher study. Below describes a timeline for the action plan.

August-September 2018. The researcher will inform parents and students of the action research study and the modified Structure Play Unit. This will take one to four days to distribute and collect all consent forms. After the researcher has collected all forms, she will teach a unit on rhyming words to her kindergarten class in a whole-group setting. This will take two weeks. After the researcher teaches this unit, she will administer the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA 2) written by Beaver (2005) as an oral pre-test for rhyming knowledge to students individually. This will take approximately five days. The oral pre-test scores will be analyzed to determine which students need additional practice with pictured rhyming words. The students selected will participate in the modified Structured Play Unit.

October 2018. The researcher will take approximately two days to help the student-participants further understand structured play and vote to choose which pictured rhyming games they would like to play during the modified Structured Play Unit. After this pre-instruction, the researcher and the student-participants will participate in the modified Structured Play Unit. Student-participants will join the researcher in playing pictured rhyming games the students chose before the modified Structured Play Unit. The unit will last four weeks. Throughout this time, the researcher will keep a journal to record her observations of the students' perceptions of the modified Structured Play Unit.

November 2018. The researcher will administer the oral post-test to each student-participant individually. Each student participant will also complete a student survey about their feelings towards the modified Structured Play Unit. All of the data collected will be analyzed by the researcher to determine if the modified Structured Play Unit had an impact on the early literacy skill of pictured rhyming words. The researcher will then write a report of her findings from this action research study. The report will approximately take four weeks.

December 2018. The researcher will prepare a final analysis of the report and give a presentation to parents and student-participants during the school's curriculum night. A presentation to the administration and literacy coach will be given in the school's conference room after the parent presentation so their input may also be shared. This will take two days. Following the presentations, the researcher will develop a second action plan in order to determine her next steps in the action research cycle. This will take approximately two weeks to complete.

Facilitating Educational Change

The researcher has future goals of changing kindergarten pedagogy to be more developmentally appropriate for our youngest learners. Using her action research platform, the researcher showed kindergarten teacher colleagues, administration, and district personnel that the English/Language Arts (ELA) standards could be taught and mastered by our youngest learners in a more developmentally appropriate manner. This positive educational change would impact our youngest learners and kindergarten

teachers by alleviating some of the pressures they experience due to inappropriate pedagogies being used to teach these rigorous ELA standards.

When attempting to effect educational change, the researcher understands that she will be faced with challenges such as district expectations, lack of diverse resources, and professional development framed around theory and practice. In accordance with Dewey (1938), Johnson (2006) stated, “If we want fundamental changes in the quality of education, then we must focus on the quality of education” (p. 4). Ultimately, districts, schools, teachers, and students must exemplify cooperative learning, embracing diversity in all aspects, and meeting students’ individual needs by offering choice and investing in their interests as learners in every classroom. (Johnson, 2006) Unfortunately, teachers currently have little flexibility with setting the direction and managing instructional programs. They are made to follow predetermined, by district curriculum specialists, curriculum maps no matter the needs of the students. The researcher feels there are people in her district that sit in their offices and make decisions that look great on paper, but when applied to the classroom are not efficient. It would be a great impact to be able to get these people in our classrooms to see how their decisions ultimately affect the youngest students. Many administrators focus on being the biggest and the best at everything with little to no consideration for developmentally appropriate practices for the youngest learners.

In preparation to address the challenges mentioned above, the researcher understands the importance of fully understanding her craft. The researcher and others

will not completely understand where we are going until we look back at where we have been. Education programs, policy, and reform are ever-changing.

[C]urriculum is being organized scientifically for efficiency, deriving learning objectives from social and economic needs and casting teachers as managers of the process of producing student achievement scores. But both sets of standards, and particularly those in reading/language arts, deflect attention from their ideological underpinnings by virtue of being situated within a testing movement. Rather than asking whose knowledge, language, and points of view are most worth teaching children, teachers and administrators are pressed to ask how well children are scoring on standardized measures of achievement. (Flinders & Thornton, 2013, p. 266)

The researcher must understand the district personnel's reasons behind decisions of curriculum mapping and instructional practices/resources. With this information, the researcher can then build a case framed around theory and developmentally appropriate practices to help administration and district personnel better understand why their decisions may need to be rethought with further reflection, teacher input, and classroom observations.

To effect this type of educational change, the professional learning community must be conducive to a culture of kindness, openness, and the pursuit of positive educational change. Due to the pressure of federal and state funding initiatives, school districts are being mandated by the legislature, requiring children to absorb and perform academic tasks, which, in most cases, are not being considered developmentally

appropriate. The educational system has changed many times over the course of history due in large part to federal and state legislation. Educators need space in their classrooms for students to become invested in their learning by finding what they are interested in and moving forward. Students would then be able to activate their prior knowledge to gain meaning from what they are learning. (Dewey, 1938) Due to the pressure of teaching mandated standards and high-stakes testing, school experiences are not what they should be. This is an important time in education as demands are going larger each year and expanding to the youngest of our children in the public school system.

Summary of Research Findings

“Action research allows teachers to study their own classrooms—for example, their own instructional methods, their own students, and their own assessments—in order to better understand them and to be able to improve their quality or effectiveness” (Mertler, 2014, p. 4). A four-week Structured Play Unit was used with nine kindergarten student-participants to determine if structured play affected the early literacy skill of pictured rhyming words in the Fall of 2017. This quantitative action research study began with a pre-test to determine which students would participate in the Structured Play Unit. Throughout the unit, the nine student-participants joined the researcher in playing pictured rhyming games (Appendix I). A teacher journal was also kept to record observations of the student-participants’ reactions, feelings, and comments about the pictured rhyming games and structured play. At the end of the four-week unit, the nine-student participants were given a post-test to determine if the Structured Play Unit had a positive or negative effect between the pre-test and post-test scores. Student-participants

also completed a student survey indicating their feelings about the Structured Play Unit and the pictured rhyming games that were played. Mertler (2014) stated, “polyangulation is the process of relating or integrating two or more sources of data to establish their quality and accuracy” (p. 42). In this action research study, the researcher used quantitative data through the pre-test and post-test, as well as, a teacher journal and student surveys to polyangulate the data collected. Overall, student-participants’ pre-test and post-test scores, as well as, the teacher journal observations and student surveys showed that the Structured Play Unit had a positive effect on learning the early literacy skill of pictured rhyming words. Please refer to chapters three and four for more detailed information about the methodology and findings related to this study.

Throughout the data collection, five themes emerged: *Conflict Resolution, Student Engagement and Building Confidence, Understanding Student Personalities, Eliminating Distractions, and Grouping*. Due to the themes that emerged, the researcher found new possibilities for the learning community of student-participants that could be used to implement the Structured Play Unit with future research better. Perhaps more importantly, the researcher believes that district and state mandates for the teaching of rigorous English/Language Arts (ELA) standards impacting our youngest learners is the bigger concern here. However, using this action research paradigm to study alternative instructional strategies to teach kindergarteners these rigorous ELA standards is the purpose of this study. Roskos and Christie (2007) stated, “How to make the connection between play, early learning, and early literacy clear in standards frameworks and language remains a hard problem, and one that continues to reduce play’s role in a

standards-driven world” are still relevant in education today (p. 90). Their research also includes that play settings are a direct extension of academic concepts and skills with the teacher’s role as a guide for students moving them towards instructional goals through interaction in a play setting. (Roskos and Christie, 2011)

Suggestions for Future Research

According to Roskos and Christie (2011), “Studies of the effects of play on specific early-literacy skills, such as phonological awareness or alphabet-letter knowledge, are few and far between” (p. 215). The researcher believes there is a need for her to pursue another action research cycle continuing upon her previous action research study. This cycle would include the same Structured Play Unit with modifications such as direct whole-group lessons on rhyming words before the pre-test, beginning the unit with more explanation about how structured play is conducted, and having the student-participants chose the pictured rhyming games they will play during the modified Structured Play Unit. Since action research is cyclical by nature, the researcher would like to extend her study by implementing it with a new group of kindergarteners in the Fall of 2018 to apply modifications and gather more data on the impact of structured play on early literacy skills such as rhyming. The researcher feels that it is important to gather more data about the effects of structured play as an alternative pedagogy for the more developmentally appropriate instruction of the rigorous ELA standards for our youngest learners. Once more data collected and analyzed through additional action research studies, the researcher would then like to confront her school’s administration team and possibly district personnel about the effects of alternative instructional strategies for

teaching our youngest learners the rigorous academic standards set forth by the state and emphasized with district expectations.

Conclusion

Through this action research paradigm, the researcher was given the opportunity to further her knowledge of curriculum and instructional practices to gain more understanding of the way she conducts her classroom and how to make life for the students in her care better. Action research gave the researcher a model to use to effect change in her classroom, collaborate with student-participants and colleagues, critically reflect upon instructional practices, and ultimately providing “justification of one’s teaching practices” (Mertler, 2014, p. 21). Findings from the present quantitative action research study suggest that structured play positively affected the overall growth in knowledge for nine kindergarten student-participants in the early literacy skill of pictured rhyming words based upon their pre-test and post-test scores. This data collection was polyangulated with a teacher journal and student surveys to gather more information of the insights and observations of the researcher and student-participants.

Roskos and Christie (2007) have proposed that a considerable amount, but not all, classroom play should be networked with instructional goals related to academic content. Play, in and of itself, represents a network of interactions characterized by nonliterality, intrinsic motivation, self-initiation, and valuation of means over ends. But this highly motivating network must be joined with other activities in the preschool classroom in clear and consistent ways to support the progressive learning of difficult ideas. In large and small groups, children can be taught new

concepts, but it is in play that they put such concepts to practical use (from the child's point of view), and thus practice the transfer of new ideas to real situations. (Roskos & Christie, 2011, p. 218)

However, and maybe greater than what this study found was the realization of the academic pressures placed on students, teachers, administrators, and school districts from the state-mandated rigorous academic standards being formed and enforced by political figures whom may have never observed the effects of their decisions on today's classrooms. It is our responsibility as educators to continue to question others, stay passionate and firm in our beliefs, and understand different educational theory and practices to advocate for our students when it comes to developmentally appropriate practices for our youngest learners.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Date:

Dear [Parent(s)/Guardian(s)]:

My name is Lauren Adams and I am your child's Kindergarten teacher. I am currently a doctoral student at the University of South Carolina. I am conducting an action research study to determine if the implementation of structured play has an impact on the early literacy skill of phonological awareness, more specifically rhyming. I am interested in how play affects literacy. I plan to use the state assigned Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA): Word Analysis for a pre-test and post-test with each student.

Your child's participation will involve taking the DRA: Word Analysis assessment once prior to the implementation of structured play, as well as after the implementation of structured play. The assessment is a series of pictures where your child will have to choose which of the images rhyme. Your child will also be involved in structured play. This would consist of hands-on rhyming games and activities to help them become more familiar with rhyming pictures and words.

If you choose for your child not to participate, please know there will be no penalty. This in no way will affect your child negatively. They are still entitled to receive developmentally appropriate instruction from the teacher just as they would if the study were not being conducted. Please note that your child will still be given the state assessment (DRA), but they will not participate in the treatment (structured play) and their scores will not be added to the results of the study. Your child's participation is voluntary, and he/she can withdraw from participation at any time without penalty. The results of the study will be shared, but your child's name will not be used. Data collection will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone. All data will be destroyed within one year of completing the study.

If you have any questions concerning this action research study or your child's participation in this study, please feel free to contact me at XXX-XXXX or through [email].

Sincerely,

Lauren Adams

Kindergarten Teacher at Eagle Elementary School

Doctoral Student at The University of South Carolina in Curriculum and Instruction

I do agree for my child to participate. ~ I do not agree for my child to participate.

Parent's Name _____ Child's Name _____

Parent's Signature _____

Appendix B: Teacher Directions for Word Analysis Tasks

Teacher Directions for *DRA Word Analysis* Tasks

Specific teacher directions for each of the 40 *DRA Word Analysis* tasks are included in this section. The task number and objective(s) are identified at the top of the page. The directions for each task are divided into three sections. The first section, "Prior to the Assessment," lists the materials needed for the administration of the task. The second section, "Administering the Assessment," provides the directions for a demonstration and shared demonstration of the task, and the actual task assessment. The last section, "After the Assessment," includes guidelines for scoring the student's responses and determining the next step.

It is important for teachers to follow the specific directions for administering, (i.e., say, point, don't point, etc.). All statements, words, sounds that are in bold are to be read aloud to the student. Sounds are to be given when a letter or letters appear between diagonal lines, such as /b/ or /cl/. Isolated vowel sounds are marked, such as the short *e* sound appears /ĕ/ while the long *e* sound appears /ē/.

A stopwatch is used in some tasks to document the amount of time it takes for the student to complete designated "timed" tasks. In timed tasks teachers are looking for quick and/or automatic responses. An icon of a stopwatch has been included on timed tasks. Each timed task has a maximum length of time recorded in minutes and seconds after the objective.

A 3-second wait time is given for letter and word identification, while for tasks in which students are asked to generate words or sentences, up to 8 seconds is allowed. Teachers are to count silently "1-one-thousand, 2-one-thousand, 3-one-thousand" for a 3-second wait time and up to "8-one-thousand" for an 8-second wait time.

It is highly recommended that teachers do not comment on the student's responses during the actual assessment of a task, but they are encouraged to make positive comments and/or praise the student's efforts after the task is completed.

Appendix C: Word Analysis Task 1: Distinguishing Pictured Rhyming Words

Task 1

Distinguishing pictured rhyming words

Objective: To identify a picture in a set that rhymes with the first picture

Prior to the Assessment

- Assemble the following materials:
- *Student Assessment Book: Task 1*
 - *Record of Responses: Task 1*
 - Folded sheet of plain paper (optional)

Administering the Assessment

Use the *Recording Guidelines* provided in General Guidelines, page 18, to record your observation after each response in the *Record of Responses*.

Demonstration

1. Say: ***In each row there are two pictured words that rhyme.* I will ask you to point to a picture that rhymes with the first picture in each row. I will show you what to do.***
[**Note:** You may use a folded sheet of plain paper to cover the pictures below the row on which you are focusing if it is helpful for the student.]
2. Point to each picture as you say: ***Glue, tree, cat, two.*** Pause between the words, but do not say, “and.”
3. Point to the glue, and say: ***Glue ends with /ōō/***
4. Point to the tree, and say: ***Tree ends with /ē/. Glue, tree do not rhyme.***
5. Point to the cat, and say: ***Cat ends with /at/. Glue, cat do not rhyme.***
6. Point to the two and say: ***Two ends with /ōō/. Glue, two rhyme.***

Shared Demonstration

1. Say: ***Let’s do one together now.***
2. Point to each picture in the second row as you say: ***Nose, top, rose, shoe. Now, you say each one.*** Wait while student says each one. Give the name of the picture if the student has difficulty recalling the name.
3. Then, say: ***Point to a picture that rhymes with nose.***
 - If CORRECT, say: ***That’s right. Nose, rose rhyme.***
 - If INCORRECT, say: ***Let’s say together, nose, top, rose, shoe.*** Point to each picture as you both say: ***Nose, top, rose, shoe.*** Point to the nose, and say: ***Nose ends with /ōz/.*** Point to top, and say: ***Top ends with /op/.*** ***Nose, top do not rhyme.*** Point to rose, and say: ***Rose ends with /ōz/.*** ***Nose, rose rhyme.*** Point to shoe and say: ***Shoe ends with /ōō/.*** ***Nose, shoe do not rhyme.***
4. Say: ***Do you understand what to do?*** Repeat directions and/or demonstration if necessary. ***If you cannot find a word that rhymes, say “I don’t know.”***

*If students are not familiar with the word *rhyme*, explain that words that rhyme are words that end with the same sound and give several examples.

Task 1

Assessment

1. Start with the first set of pictures and say: **train, duck, wing, rain.**
[Note: STOP THIS TASK if the student responds incorrectly to the first three sets of pictures.]
2. Say: **Now you say each one.** Wait while the student responds. Say the name of the picture if the student has difficulty recalling the name.
3. Then, say: **Point to a picture that rhymes with train.**
4. Continue the task. Follow the same procedures as above using the remaining sets of pictures.

After the Assessment

Scoring Guidelines

- Count each identified picture that rhymes with the first picture in the set as 1 point. See an example of a completed *Record of Responses* for this task below.

Total score: 8

Determining Next Step

- Continue on to Task 2, “Distinguishing initial sounds of pictured words.”

Distinguishing pictured rhyming words					Task 1		
Name: <i>Example</i>							
1st Date: <i>9-05</i>		2nd Date:		3rd Date:			
Level of Control	No. L1s	Some	Gaining	Control			
Total Score	0-2	3-5	6-7	8			
				1st	2nd	3rd	
1. train	duck	wing	rain	✓			
2. bat	sun	hat	cake	✓			
3. man	tan	bed	chain	<i>chain</i>	✓		
4. boat	goat	cat	leaf	✓			
5. snake	coat	pig	rake	✓			
6. bee	tree	foot	log	✓			
7. king	key	hand	ring	<i>key</i>			
8. dog	rake	frog	duck	✓			
Total Score		6	/8	/8	/8	/8	
Other Observations:							

Appendix D: Word Analysis Task 1: Recording Sheet

Distinguishing pictured rhyming words
Task 1

Name _____

1st Date _____ 2nd Date _____ 3rd Date _____

Level of Control	No/Little	Some	Gaining	Control
Total Score	0-2	3-5	6-7	8

				1st	2nd	3rd
1. train	duck	wing	rain			
2. bat	sun	hat	cake			
3. man	fan	bed	chain			
4. boat	goat	cat	leaf			
5. snake	coat	pig	rake			
6. bee	tree	foot	log			
7. king	key	hand	ring			
8. dog	rake	frog	duck			
Total Score				/8	/8	/8

Other Observations:

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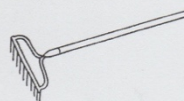
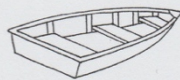
Appendix E: Word Analysis Task 1: Picture Cues for Assessment

Task 1

☆ 			2
☆ 			
			
			
			

Distinguishing pictured rhyming words 3

Task 1



4

Distinguishing pictured rhyming words

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Appendix G: Student Survey

Directions: The participant-researcher should ask each student to think about the rhyming games that were played over the last several weeks. Read each question carefully, repeat as needed, and instruct the student to color in the face that most directly relates how they felt to the question asked.

1. How did you feel about playing a rhyming game by yourself?
2. How did you feel about playing games with other students?
3. How did you feel about playing rhyming game #1? (show student the game for reference)
4. How did you feel about playing rhyming game #2? (show student the game for reference)
5. How did you feel about playing rhyming game #3? (show student the game for reference)
6. How did you feel about playing rhyming game #4? (show student the game for reference)

Students will use the following to color in the appropriate face for their answers.

1.		
2.		
3.		

4.		
5.		
6.		

Appendix H: Data Analysis Minitab Express Software Program

Paired t: pretest, posttest

Descriptive Statistics

Sample	N	Mean	StDev	SE Mean
pretest	9	3.3333	1.2247	0.4082
posttest	9	6.5556	1.7401	0.5800

Estimation for Paired Difference

Mean	StDev	SE Mean	95% CI for μ_d
-3.2222	1.8559	0.6186	(-4.6488, -1.7956)

μ_d : mean of (pretest - posttest)

Test

Null hypothesis $H_0: \mu_d = 0$

Alternative hypothesis $H_1: \mu_d \neq 0$

T-Value	P-Value
-5.21	0.0008

